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AT THE BAR.

A Tale.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "A CRUISE UPON WHEELS," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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This Tale is dedicated

TO

DOCTOR GUENEAU DE MUSSY

BY

HIS OBLIGED FRIEND

THE AUTHOR.

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AT THE BAR.



CHAPTER I.

FAR AWAY.

THE marriage of Gilbert Penmore with Gabrielle Descartes was certainly an imprudent one, and threatened, at the time of the opening of this story, to turn out very ill for both the one and the other.

Gilbert Penmore was the youngest son of his Excellency Thomas Gilbert Penmore, who, in consideration of great losses incurred at the time of that swift depreciation in West Indian property by which so many unoffending persons were suddenly reduced to comparative poverty, was intrusted by the Colonial Office with the governorship of one of our West Indian islands. Soon after the birth of his youngest boy, Mr. Penmore had the misfortune to lose his wife; and then it was that he

determined upon keeping his last-born son and one daughter with him in the West Indies, while he sent his other children to be educated in England. Our governor's appointment was not a good one, and the facilities for educating children in the West Indies are but few; so that when it was proposed to him by his old friend and distant connection Monsieur Descartes, who was governor of one of the French West-Indian islands, that the boy Gilbert should be sent over to be brought up along with his own sons, Mr. Penmore determined, though much against his will, to let the boy go, and kept only his daughter to be his little housekeeper and companion. "The boy will have opportunities of getting instruction which it would be impossible for me to afford him," Mr. Penmore said to himself, "and he will pick up a knowledge of French into the bargain;" and he did pick up a knowledge of French with a vengeance, as will be hereafter seen.

The family of Monsieur and Madame Descartes consisted of two boys and a girl, and their education was conducted in the first instance by a governess, and subsequently by a learned young Frenchman, whom M. Des-

cartes caused to be exported from St. Omer, and who was ready to make himself useful, partly as secretary to the governor, and partly as tutor to his children. These boys of M. Descartes were stupid, idle lads enough ; and it was partly, perhaps, with a view of stimulating them to exertion that the French governor had proposed that young Penmore should be associated with them in their studies. The lads, however, were not to be dealt with so easily, and were more ready to avail themselves of their young friend's good example in their hours of play than in those devoted to study. Gilbert himself was an industrious youngster enough, and very often had to prepare his companions' lessons as well as his own.

I have spoken of Mademoiselle Gabrielle, the daughter of Governor Descartes, as being associated with her brothers in their studies—and indeed to a considerable extent this was the case ; nor is it necessary to conceal the fact that in many branches of education this young lady managed quite to outdo her indolent brothers, and almost keep pace with Arthur himself. Between these two, as might rationally be expected, a wonderful attachment was

not long in springing up. They were continually together. They helped each other with their lessons; and when these were over, and the time came for such play as the climate permitted, or for an evening ramble by the sea-shore, Mademoiselle Gabrielle was sure to be of the party. Nobody interfered much with the young lady's liberty. Her papa was always busy with his duties as governor; and her mamma was simply a fine lady, a *petite maitresse*, who was ready to depute the care of her family to any body who would mercifully relieve her of it. In the time of the governess our young lady was certainly more looked after; but when that lady was superseded by the ex-pensioner of St. Omer, Mademoiselle Gabrielle was left pretty much to her own devices, and to the following of her own instincts.

Luckily these were in the main excellent. She had inherited her father's rather than her mother's nature; and Governor Descartes was as fine a gentleman, and as good a fellow into the bargain, as ever governed an island—Sancho Panza himself not excluded. He was impulsive and affectionate, with rather a warm temper and a very warm heart; and in these

qualities his daughter certainly took after him. Both of them were sound in the great things; and if the governor was a little irritable at times, when his liver was affected, and if Mademoiselle Gabrielle was during the earlier years of her life a bit of a Tom-boy, there was not much harm done after all. She was not what would be called a pretty child. She was thin and sallow,—this last quality being, perhaps, the effect of the climate; but there was a certain innocence and unworldliness about her expression, which, through all the changes which her face underwent as she grew from a child to a girl and from a girl to an almost woman, never left her. She was six years old, and Gilbert was eight, when they first plighted their troths to each other; and when the two grew to be sixteen and eighteen respectively, they had in no respect wearied of each other's society. How those ten years were passed I have not time to tell; I wish I had. The life of that boy and girl on that West-Indian island had something of Paul and Virginia about it, which would be very pleasant to follow, did not the main incidents of my story, to be hereafter developed, demand all the space at my command.

Of course it is unnecessary to say that during this period of ten years the intercourse between the young people was from time to time suspended. Gilbert's father would send for him at intervals, for the pleasure of having the lad by him and giving him a holiday, as he called it. I am afraid that Gilbert's real holiday—though he was warmly attached to both his father and sister—was rather spent at school; such school as was kept by the ex-student of St. Omer in the house of Governor Descartes.

It was on the occasion of one of these visits to his father that Gilbert, not knowing exactly what to do with himself, and being a boy always eager for information, got hold of certain English law-books, of which his father had a good collection to help him in the duties of his office, and sitting himself down with his head in his hands, began to pore over the volumes by the hour together. And he had two reasons for thus proceeding. First, a wish to *improve himself in the English language*; and next, very soon after he had made the first plunge into law, the science and logic of the thing began to exercise such an influence over him—he being at the time a lad of some six-

teen years' standing—that he could not abandon the study he had voluntarily taken up without something of an effort.

It has been said above that he wanted first to improve himself in the English language; and this brings me to an announcement of a rather startling nature, which will be found to affect our hero's career not a little. Gilbert Penmore, though of English birth, having been brought up almost entirely among French people and in a French colony, had attained to a most perfect knowledge of the French language, and in doing so, had to some extent let go his own. In his occasional visits to his home this had, of course, been frequently observed and laughed at; but as the boy grew up to be about the age I have spoken of, the joke began to be rather too good a one, and his mistakes and his accent began so much to distress his father, that the worthy gentleman at last spoke seriously to his son upon the subject, and entreated him to remember how much it might stand in his way in life if he, an Englishman, was found to be imperfectly acquainted with his own language. “A language,” the worthy gentleman added, “as superior to the other as light is to darkness;

a language which can deal with the highest subjects as well as the most trivial; a language into which even the Bible may be, as it has been, fitly translated, and which being capable of the dignity of blank verse, can give us, when we require it, poetic dialogues free from the French jingle of perpetual rhymes." Gilbert promised in the vilest English that he would remember the hint and act upon it; and going back to "school," talked French incessantly for six months.

It was soon after this time that an incident occurred which wrought a great change in our youngster's life. His little friend and playfellow fell very sick of a fever, such as abound in those climates; and though she recovered from it ultimately, the medical authorities pronounced it indispensably necessary that she should at once be sent off to Europe for the more complete restoration of her health. There may have been, and I believe there was, another reason for this journey. Madame Descartes, who had neglected her children while they *were* children, now that her daughter was growing up, began to take some interest in her welfare, and more especially, being a very worldly woman, to feel a strong wish that the

future of her daughter might be a brilliant one. It began then to strike her that the growing intimacy between Gabrielle and young Penmore—a lad of eighteen, not even started yet in life—could hardly lead to the fulfilment of her ambition; and this proposal of the doctor's, that the invalid girl should travel to Europe without delay, met with the greater approval of Madame Descartes, because she felt that it would at all events be the means of separating her daughter from this young man, who at this time certainly did seem to be any thing but the kind of person who could insure a prosperous future to Mademoiselle Gabrielle Descartes.

The news that Gabrielle was going away descended upon poor Gilbert like a thunder-clap. The continual intercourse between the two, which had now lasted so long, had got to be regarded by both as a thing of course, and which was never to be interrupted. Indeed, the despair of the two young people was so little to be hidden, that Madame lost no time in hurrying her daughter's departure. This, however, was not accomplished till after the lovers had effected a stolen meeting, and had, not without many tears, once more renewed

that pledge which they had given to each other when a couple of children.

What else were they now? What did they know of the world? what of life, and its difficulties and necessities? Heaven help them, that knowledge was all to come.

The parting between the lovers took place some little time before that of Gabrielle's departure, for Gilbert was now to go back to his father for a season, having by this time reached an age when it was necessary that he should begin to think how he was to spend the long life which, humanly speaking, lay before him.

It was not long after Gilbert's return to his father's roof that the news reached him that Mademoiselle Gabrielle had started for Europe under the care of an English lady, who was a very old friend and schoolfellow of Madame Descartes, and who had undertaken the charge of the young girl for the next few years. During that time she was to live in England.

I believe that never once from the time of that parting, which has just been alluded to, between the lovers, did young Penmore for one moment doubt that Gabrielle was to be his wife. On this subject his mind was toler-

ably tranquil. That thing was to be. The only thing to be done now was to bring it about as soon as possible: and that meant work. Gilbert's father, with his family to provide for, and his means comparatively small when the expenses of his position are considered, could do nothing for him pecuniarily. The young man himself had a very small sum left him by his mother, and which was to come to him on his majority; but it was rather a sum which might help him to make a start in life, than a fortune to be looked to as a source of income. It was necessary, then, that he should adopt some profession without delay, and embark himself in it with as little expense as was possible.

And now there came to him the remembrance of those books on law which he had found in his father's library; and to these he returned at this time with a purpose, studying them with a degree of success which seemed to show that he really had some aptitude for the acquirement of this particular branch of knowledge. No doubt it was because those books came in his way that he took up with the study of the law; but how many illustrious persons have there not been whose choice of a

profession has been influenced—and with the best results—by what came in their way at the critical period of passing from boyhood to man's estate !

The small collection of books on legal subjects in Governor Penmore's library, and such others on the same topic as were to be obtained on the island, were in due time exhausted ; and our young gentleman being still bent on becoming Lord Chancellor, it was at length decided that Gilbert should set sail for the mother country, to be entered at one of the Inns of Court, and to prosecute his studies under professional guidance. His father could get him a free passage to England, and would provide the fees which would be required for his entrance at Lincoln's Inn and his education in barrister's chambers. More than this he could not do ; and it was arranged that, till he came of age, Gilbert should live on money borrowed on the sum left him by his mother, and afterwards on the money itself, till such time as he should be in the receipt of a professional income. "Not long," Gilbert thought, poor fellow.

At last a certain night came when the lad found himself actually standing upon the deck

of an English man-of-war bound for home; and as he stood, with his hand upon the bulwark, in the still tropical night, he gazed with fixed eyes into the darkness before him like one who would fain see his destiny in the future. "I will do great things," he said. "I will go more and more deeply into this calling, which to me seems so fascinating. I will undertake some great defence, which I will conduct so as to become celebrated every where. I will rise to be Lord Chancellor; and Gabrielle shall be my wife, to cheer and help me through it all."

CHAPTER II.

AT HOME.

Two young people are sitting at breakfast in a small room in a house in the suburbs of London. They are rather an odd-looking couple, and curiously enough—though this does sometimes happen with married people—they are rather alike. Both are sallow; both have large dark eyes and dark hair; both incline to be thin; and both, but especially the lady, talk English with a slight accent. This, however, will not be reproduced here; nor, indeed, could the thing be done, as their knowledge of the language in which they are conversing is too perfect to permit of their making mistakes in the choice of words or in grammar, and is, in fact, a matter only of tone and accent.

The breakfast would appear to be of any thing but a luxurious sort. Part of a stale loaf, some pieces of dry toast, and the *débris*

of an egg, decorate the table, which is covered with a rather dirty table-cloth.

I have said that these young people were sallow and dark and thin; but I shall have chosen my words very ill if I have conveyed the impression that they were either ill-favoured or sickly. Both were straight and well-grown, and the man gave good evidence of that kind of wiriness which is so superior to mere fleshy strength. So with his face. It was nervous, lively, intelligent; but it was not what would be called handsome. His expression was somewhat of an anxious kind,—perhaps a little unhappy; but when he addressed the lady opposite to him, it lit up directly, and was singularly pleasant to see.

I have said that between the man and his wife there was a certain resemblance, and I have spoken of their being both of a sallow complexion; but I believe that, with regard to the lady at any rate, I have chosen the word ill. I ought rather to have said that her complexion simply bore evidence of her having been born in a climate where the sun is less merciful than in these temperate regions. But it was a clear and healthy colour, and her eyes, which were of a gray colour, said nothing

of illness or languor. They were a very young couple: the husband did not appear to be more than two- or three-and-twenty, and the wife was two or three years younger.

At the time of this their introduction to the reader it appeared that the two were sitting in solemn conclave over a letter which lay on the table before them, and the contents of which appeared rather to have puzzled them.

"You see we must do something," said the young man. "That money left me by my poor mother is nearly gone, and what I can make by writing for newspapers and law magazines is certainly not enough for the expenses of even this 'small establishment.'"

"And the attorneys," said the lady, who was indeed none other than our former friend Gabrielle Descartes, only we must now call her Gabrielle Penmore,—“those cruel, wicked attorneys; are they still as little ready to help you as ever?”

"I might as well never have been 'called,' for any thing I can get to do from them."

"The wretches!"

"Gabrielle, they actually laugh at my foreign accent, and say that so ridiculous an

idea was never heard of as a man getting up in a court of law and pleading in doubtful English."

"My poor Gilbert, what are we to do? Such a life as you lead, you ought to succeed. You are always working and striving, and you have no enjoyments, and such poor clothes, and—O Gilbert, you are not sorry that you married me?"

"Sorry! Well, in one respect I am sorry for having brought you into such a scrape."

"We shall get out of it yet. Look here, Gilbert: suppose I were to go and commit some crime, and you were to defend me. I will if you like."

They both laughed heartily at this idea. Then they came back to the original subject which had been under discussion—the letter.

"It is curious," said Gabrielle, "this proposal of your cousin to come and live with us arriving just at this moment. It would help us very much, no doubt. What sort of a person is she, Gilbert?"

"I hardly know. I have heard my father say that she is excessively vain, and rather spiteful."

"O Gilbert!"

“Her father and my mother were first-cousins; so she and I are what lawyers call first-cousins once removed. I have only seen her once, and I found her to be very much my senior,—ten or a dozen years, I should say; very carefully made up though, and with some pretension to good looks. She told me that I had inherited personally all the defects of both my parents, and none of their beauties.”

“What a dreadful woman!”

“I don’t think you could stand it, Gabrielle.”

“Yes, but I intend to stand it. Look here, Gilbert. We have got our way, and are married and together, which was what we wanted, and which so few people attain to so soon. Surely it would be very wrong for us to complain and grumble at this small inconvenience? You say she’s very well off; so, with what she contributes, we shall get on better in our housekeeping; and then you’ll be able to have all sorts of comforts, and—”

Her husband tried to interrupt her, but she went on:

“And so shall I. And you won’t have to slave so hard, and you can devote yourself more to law, which you like. And then you’ll be

more in court, and ready for any thing that might come in your way; and you'll get a chance, and we shall become illustrious, and live happily ever afterwards."

Yes; they were married. That boy-and-girl attachment of the West-Indian island had come to something at last. Gilbert Penmore was not long, after he had once set foot on English ground, in finding out his old play-fellow; and as every possible obstacle that could be devised was put in the way of their intercourse,—by the special stipulation of Madame Descartes, extending at last to an order consigning the young lady to the care of an aunt living at Paris,—it came to pass that the young people took their own way out of the difficulty, and on the very day previous to that on which Gabrielle was to have started for Paris were united by bans in the parish-church of St. Benet Fink, in the city of London, the bridegroom having taken care to occupy lodgings in that parish for a good three weeks beforehand.

It was wrong, no doubt. It was a clandestine act. They were flying in the face of parents and friends. They were wanting in

patience and trustfulness and prudence. They did wrong, and they suffered for it, as is commonly the case.

They were very poor—poor enough to have to undergo many privations. Their poverty was always staring them in the face and meeting them at every turn. Then they were living upon their capital, such as it was. It was very little now, and getting less every day. There was a source of misery and anxiety at once: to know that their little store was continually diminishing, and to be mainly ignorant how it was to be replenished.

The gaps and apertures in that small income were not replenished; they were only patched and gagged for a time by all that poor Gilbert Penmore could do. After he was called, he sat in his place in court day after day the picture of hope deferred. He knew that he was a lawyer, that he had worked harder at law and studied its intricacies with greater perseverance than half the men whom he saw strutting into court with their briefs conspicuous in their hands. He knew that they were often shallow and unsound in their arguments, superficial in their apparent eloquence, brazen in their insolence,

and wrong in their facts; and yet, such is the benumbing influence of non-success, he had at times to summon all the man within him not to feel cowed before these men who he knew were his inferiors. Still he worked harder and harder. He watched the course of every case, noted its peculiarities, observed what precedents were quoted in connection with its details, and laid up precious matter for his own future guidance. He never gave in. Sometimes, indeed, it did seem rather hard to him that he *never* got a chance,—that he was never employed as a junior to get up the particulars of a case, or that when a prisoner on circuit was undefended, the judge would never catch his anxiously - expectant eye, and say: “Mr. Penmore, will *you* have the kindness to watch the case for the prisoner?”

And then, his wretched day in court over, there was hard, hard work to be done afterwards,—hard writing on law-questions, hard newspaper-work on subjects of the day, and (perhaps hardest of all to a fastidious man) the struggle to be amusing, to produce what is called “light literature”—articles for magazines and periodicals demanding new choice

of subjects and new ideas continually. Nor were his labours always crowned with success even in these departments of literature. Sometimes when he had prepared a newspaper-article on a subject which he thought a good one, he would be told that it was just a day too late; or that it was not a matter which the editor thought it safe to interfere with; or the magazine would send him back his "light literature," with a bewildering announcement that it was exceedingly good, but "not suitable" for publication in that periodical. All these are mishaps which most literary men have to go through at first; but they get through them when they are single men; and such failures are not very destructive: but in this present case every such misadventure was a serious loss, and Penmore would often find it very hard work to possess his soul in patience when so severely tried.

As to getting any assistance from friends or relatives, the thing was impossible. Governor Penmore could do nothing for his son beyond writing to his solicitor to introduce Gilbert as a young barrister seeking employment; while as to Gabrielle's relations, her mother had declined all intercourse with her

from the moment of her contracting a marriage so entirely opposed to her views, and her father was so afraid of his wife that he could only send her a present now and then, abstracted, as it were, from his own income with the greatest difficulty; for madame kept a rigid eye on all her husband's pecuniary doings, and required so much for her own expenditure in dress and luxury, that it was with the greatest difficulty that the poor governor could manage to get hold of a few pounds at rare intervals to send to his dear Gabrielle. Gilbert, for his part, did not take much by that introduction to the solicitor. Mr. Brickdale was a cautious and entirely conventional old gentleman; and Penmore's accent, and queer yellow complexion under the white barrister's-wig, made him quail before the idea of putting a case into his hands.

There was one good thing, however, got out of this connection. Mr. Brickdale was in a position to give out a good deal of work in the shape of law-copying; and at this the two would work when nothing else was to be done. I say the "two" advisedly; for in due time, and after much labour, Gabrielle attained to a considerable proficiency in round-

hand, and in due time was able to relieve her husband of this sort of drudgery at any rate.

In short, these young people were exposed to privations and troubles of the most harassing and miserable kind, and which their bringing-up and earlier habits had in no sort fitted them to undergo. It was a terrible ordeal, and one which it required great patience and courage to pass through.

And all that day, which succeeded the conversation described at the beginning of this chapter, Gabrielle pondered over these things, and thought of her husband and of his disappointments and privations, and how these last might at least be alleviated by accepting his cousin's proposal; and so at last her mind was made up, and she repeated to herself, "We have got our happiness of being together, and we would not exercise patience and wait; and so we must not think it a great matter that we have some need to be patient now, and bear together instead of bearing apart."

So when her husband came home she told him in the most wilful manner that the thing was settled, and that he was to write off to

his cousin and inform her that rooms would be prepared for her reception and that of the servant who was to accompany her, and that every thing would be ready at the commencement of the ensuing week.

CHAPTER III.

AN ARRIVAL.

THE day appointed for the arrival of Miss Carrington was not a pleasant one. It was a stormy November day, windy,—with gusts of rain. Every thing went wrong in the house in Beaumont Street. The chimneys smoked, the doors banged, a looking-glass was blown down by the wind and smashed to pieces, and poor little Mrs. Penmore's heart quailed at the omen even more than at the loss. Then the servant—the one servant—had a sulky fit, and refused to be comforted. Moreover, she took to disappearing.

It requires some experience of domestic difficulties to enable any person to appreciate the full horror of this proceeding. Something is wanted below, and the maiden is despatched promptly to get it. Instead of returning, however, she remains below, and is not unearthed without much calling and ringing.

At last she appears without the object in search of which she was sent, and disappears again in search of it. Then the area-bell rings, and a tradesman holds the young woman spell-bound on the kitchen-steps, where, of course, she cannot hear a summons from the bedroom. At last—for this is a windy day, let us remember—the door bangs, our damsel is shut out, and her mistress, having reached the stage of desperation, descends to the kitchen to see what has become of “Charlotte,” and finds her tapping at the window for admittance in a manner sufficiently aggravating. Even now, however, she is not to be considered as a secure property: she discovers that it is the right day for needlework; and when every thing is in the wildest confusion upstairs, and she is wanted there every moment, she is continually relapsing into calm stocking-mending, or perhaps does a trifle in the way of washing and ironing on her own account. Nor must it be forgotten that this is the day when discoveries are made that “we have no firewood,” or that “we are out of potatoes;” and so disappearances on quite an extended scale in search of these luxuries become not only indispensable but meritorious. It would

be difficult in this particular instance to say whether this young woman's sulkiness or her tendency to disappear was the more trying.

Of course the larger part of the work upstairs fell to the share of the mistress of the house. It was upon her that devolved all the trouble of planning which rooms were to be given to her guest and to her servant,—I believe Mrs. Penmore dreaded this last most of the two,—and how they could be arranged most satisfactorily. She it was who had to twist and turn the poor furniture about so as to make it show to the best advantage, and to execute wonders with bits of pink-calico showing through cheap muslin. As to her own bedroom, she literally despoiled it, taking all the articles that had any æsthetic pretensions at all upstairs to Miss Carrington's room, and leaving herself, as Charlotte elegantly put it, "without a stick." The room prepared for Miss Carrington presented at last quite a pretty appearance, so much will taste do in these cases, even with a very small expenditure of capital.

Altogether it was a day of many fatigues and difficulties; and besides all those, it was necessary to get up some sort of meal for the

lady, and another for the dreaded servant, both of whom were to arrive at about eight o'clock in the evening. Moreover, the butcher did not send what was required of him, and Charlotte disappeared, as might have been expected, to remind him of his neglect.

But the worst trouble of all that poor Gabrielle had to bear that day was her husband's absence. He must be away at the time when the formidable lady was to arrive. That evening he had work to do at a newspaper-office; and work in his case could never be neglected. It would be necessary, then, that Mrs. Penmore should receive her new guest alone and unsupported. Alone she must face this utter stranger, and encounter all that might be awkward, or even unpleasant, in connection with this first interview. There was nothing for it, however, but to endure and go through with it; so Gabrielle made up her mind—a proceeding which enables us to get through a great many things which appear to be absolutely unendurable.

The day and part of the evening were consumed in preparations; and it was not till the time for the arrival of Miss Carrington drew very near that Mrs. Penmore found time at

last to sit down, almost for the first time that day, and await with many nervous qualms the arrival of her guest. The tea-things were spread comfortably upon a white cloth; and there was a fowl (awful extravagance) cooking at the fire below. It had been discovered at the eleventh hour that there was no fresh-butter in the house, and Charlotte had been despatched in search of that luxury; so Gabrielle sat in an agony of dread lest the new arrivals should come before the wretched handmaid had returned from her errand.

Of course it happened so. The Fates are merciless in these cases; and Charlotte had not returned from this her last disappearance when Mrs. Penmore, who had been listening with strained attention to every sound that came from the street outside, distinctly heard the rattle of wheels on the road-way—heard them draw nearer and nearer—heard a female voice screaming the number of the house to the cabman, upon which the vehicle suddenly stopped and drew up at the door, while a furious ringing at the street-bell announced that the hour had arrived which poor Gabrielle had so long and so keenly dreaded.

And now there was nothing for it but to

go and open the door. The servant had not returned, and it was quite impossible to keep her visitor waiting outside. While she had hesitated the bell had sounded again; and it was still ringing when she at length opened the door, and found herself face to face with a middle-aged female of a fierce and acid countenance, who was standing on the door-step. Behind her was a cab, the door of which was held open by the driver, while a lady was dimly seen within waiting to emerge till it had been certainly ascertained that this was the right house.

“Does Mr. Penmore live here?” asked the acid-looking woman.

Gabrielle answered timidly in the affirmative; and she of the fierce visage having conveyed the information to the lady in the cab, this last descended without more ado and came into the house. She looked sharply at Gabrielle, who now advanced with extended hand, as if she doubted her genuineness; and then taking the offered hand in a hesitating manner, exclaimed,

“What! are you Mrs. Penmore? and don’t you keep a servant?”

“O yes, we have a servant; but she was

obliged to go out on an errand just now. Pray come in here and warm yourself," she added, opening the dining-room door.

"O," said Miss Carrington with a little scream, as she entered, "what a funny little place!"

"Funny!" What a terrible word that was! The room was little, but it was neat. It was even prettily arranged, but the furniture was not of the conventional dining-room sort; and, alas, it must be owned that in the get-up of that apartment subterfuge was not unknown. But to say "funny!"—Yes, that was a cruel word.

Meanwhile the servant—for such was the acid lady who had originally confronted Gabrielle on the door-step—followed her mistress to the door of the room, into which she looked for a moment, and then, with a slight toss of the head, returned to superintend the unlading of the cab, honouring Gabrielle as she passed with a prolonged and exhaustive stare.

While the bumping and bursting noises inseparable from the introduction of large luggage into a small house were going on in the passage, Mrs. Penmore and her guest were left confronting each other in the dining-room;

and Gabrielle saw to begin with, and as a matter of course, that the newly-arrived lady was not in the least the sort of person she had expected. Miss Carrington, to begin with, was handsomer, as far as features went, than Gabrielle had expected; but her complexion was not by any means a good one; and she had an uneasy dissatisfied expression, which made one feel uncomfortable in her presence. She seemed to be about thirty years of age, or perhaps a year or two more; was thin and haggard-looking, and had the art of saying disagreeable things in a sharp aggravating voice. I believe she could not help this; for when she really tried to be agreeable—which it must be owned was seldom enough—then it was that the most spiteful things of all would come out.

“Ah, one could tell that you were of foreign blood,” said Miss Carrington, “only by looking at you, and without hearing you speak—you’re so very dark.”

Gabrielle excused herself under this accusation as well as she could, by intimating that the sun where she was brought up was rather a powerful one, and that the inhabitants of the West-Indian islands were gener-

ally gifted with darker complexions than fell to the lot of Europeans. At this moment there was a smart rap at the door, and the form of the sour-visaged servant appeared. She seemed to be chewing venom, from the expression of her mouth.

“Well, Cantanker, what is it?” inquired Miss Carrington.

It is needful to mention that the name of this agreeable-looking female was Jane Cantanker. Destiny had, by a strange freak, fitted in this case the name to the woman in a remarkable manner.

“I merely wished to ask,” said Miss Cantanker, with the gurgling of suppressed fury in her voice, “where I am expected to set in the evening?” and she looked inquiringly round the room, as if she rather expected to see an open door, with a luxurious apartment beyond, to be devoted to her special service.

Miss Carrington looked at her hostess. “You can answer that best, I think—” she said.

“Well—” replied the poor little woman, with much hesitation, “I thought—I thought the kitchen. I was not prepared—”

“There, Cantanker, do you hear?” said

Miss Carrington; for the woman had remained like a block of marble, and had taken no notice of what Mrs. Penmore had said.

"Begging your pardon, miss," she now remarked, addressing her mistress, "I shall set in no such place; for besides that the floor is of stone, and the cheers bare Windsor ones, the servant-girl is but an ignorant maid-of-all-work, and not fit company for decent people."

There was an awkward pause after this.

"Well," said Miss Carrington, "what's to be done?"

Poor Mrs. Penmore hesitated more than ever. "I am sure I don't know; unless," she added,—“unless you would like to sit in your bedroom.”

"Do you hear?" asked Miss Carrington; for Cantanker had again become marble.

"I hear, miss," said this relentless person, condescending to answer her mistress, but looking steadily at Gabrielle, as she had done from the first. "I have not yet seen it."

"You had better ask Charlotte—as she is come back—to show it to you," said Mrs. Penmore timidly.

Miss Cantanker remained fixed and sta-

tionary. And again her mistress had to interpret.

"You had better ask Charlotte to show it to you."

Very slowly, and with her eyes still fixed upon Mrs. Penmore, the accommodating Miss Cantanker backed towards the door, and after consuming as much time in the act as possible, opened it, and vanished slowly.

"Is not my cousin at home?" inquired Miss Carrington as soon as this agreeable person had disappeared; and the lady looked inquisitively about the room, as if she expected to see the unfortunate Gilbert concealed in some corner.

"He was very sorry," Mrs. Penmore replied, "very sorry indeed, but he was obliged to be away to-night."

"I think he might have stretched a point under the circumstances," said the lady in an injured tone.

"I do assure you," urged poor Gabrielle, "that nothing but a matter of business, which could not be put off, would have taken him out on such an occasion."

After this there was a pause of some considerable duration. It was only broken by

the information conveyed by Miss Carrington to her hostess, that "she never took tea;" and as the meal which had been prepared for her special benefit *was* tea, this was rather disconcerting. There was nothing for it but to get out a bottle of Marsala and decant it then and there. Miss Carrington, to judge from her expression of countenance, did not seem to like this much, but she did not say any thing; and presently there was another sharp tap at the door, followed without ceremony by the entry of Miss Cantanker, with an expression of countenance which it was not good to behold.

"Well, Cantank—" Miss Carrington was beginning, when her maid interrupted her.

"I wish to know, miss, whether I have come here to be insulted and put in a dog-hole to sleep?"

This tremendous question, which was put to Miss Carrington, but *at* the luckless Gabrielle, was on so fearful a scale that poor Mrs. Penmore was struck entirely speechless by it.

"Explain yourself, Cantanker," her mistress interposed; "do you mean that your room is not what you like?"

"Like!" echoed the maiden, "like!" and she spoke with awful slowness and solemnity.

"It is a garret. It has a sloping roof. The cheeks is rush-bottomed. There are no curtains to the bed, which itself is a turn-up. There is no carpet, but a bedside. There is not a morsel of fire; and what is more, there is no grate to put one in."

"Really, I think—" Miss Carrington commenced in an injured tone, and addressing Gabrielle. But Cantanker had not done yet.

"And hif Mrs. Penmore thinks," she went on, still, however, speaking to her mistress, "hif she thinks that I am going to put up with a dog-hole, and that I am come here tamely to be insulted, she will find that she is mistaken, and that Jane Cantanker is not the woman to be put upon."

Here the lady relapsed into silence, and stood looking defiance at a photographic portrait of Mr. Penmore, which hung against the wall.

"I really think," resumed Miss Carrington, "that you might have provided a little better for the comfort of my servant, Mrs. Penmore."

"I thought it was very comfortable," urged the wretched Gabrielle. "I know that it is all nice and clean; and as to fire, I had

no idea that your servant would expect such a thing. Surely it is very unusual—”

“Jane Cantanker is more than a servant to me,—she is a companion, and I look upon any slight put upon her as an injury done to myself.”

“There is an apartment next to my mistress’s, and it is that which I should wish to hoccupy,” remarked Miss Cantanker sententially and still looking at the photograph.

“O, that is my husband’s study,” cried Mrs. Penmore, aghast.

“Study or no study, that is the room I should wish to hoccupy,” repeated Cantanker.

“Really,” Miss Carrington remarked with a slight toss, “I think that studies are all very well; but under the circumstances, when people get a good price for their rooms—”

Gabrielle started at that sting, and the West-Indian element in her blood was all on fire. But presently she remembered how much was at stake, and called up her newly-formed resolution to endure.

“If you could put up with it just at first,” she said, “we might see afterwards what other arrangement could be made.”

But Miss Cantanker was not to be dealt

with so easily. She hastened to remind the assembled company that she was not going to be put upon, and that to sleep in a dog-hole was a thing she would not consent to do. Moreover, she stated that she had never been so treated in the whole course of her life; and this consideration appearing to strike her in a piteous light, and to fill her with great commiseration for herself, she finally asserted that she did not think to have lived to be thus cruelly dealt with, and bursting into a volley of sobs, sunk into a neighbouring chair and took to hysterics.

After this there was a great commotion. Every consolatory topic was tried, and for a time in vain, till it occurred to somebody—possibly because the lady herself, with a glazed eye fixed upon the decanter, stammered forth that “she felt a-sinking,”—it occurred to somebody to administer a glass of Marsala, followed swiftly by a second; a course of treatment which was attended with such success that at last this angelic martyr, after much flattery and cajolery, so far gave way as to consent to occupy the “dog-hole” for one night, and one night only, on the condition, distinctly understood, that she was never

asked so much as to pass its detested threshold again.

And this difficulty disposed of, there remained the mistress to appease as well as the maid. Miss Carrington did not like her room. It was small and stuffy, and the pattern of the chintz was hideous. Then there was no cheval-glass; and that, mind, must be remedied the very next day. The room had not a sunny aspect; a condition of affairs which could not be remedied so easily. Then the bed was not placed north and south; and that was an unpardonable piece of negligence, and must be set right at once, though it implied the moving of every article of furniture in the room. Moreover, she wished for a night-light; and the unhappy Charlotte had to be despatched at a late hour to get some. Finally, she was very much disappointed that there was no broth in the house, as she always liked—not taking tea—to have a cup of broth the last thing.

That night, when at last the house was quiet and her guests, for a time at least disposed of, poor Mrs. Penmore fell into a paroxysm of bitter grief, and wept till her pillow was wet with her tears. It was past three o'clock in the morning when her husband came

back; and when she saw how tired and worn he looked, and thought how much he went through for her, she determined that at least for that night he should not be distressed by any thing that she could tell him. So, as he leaned over the bed and showed her the money that he had earned, she put her arms about his neck and smiled upon him, and told him how his cousin had arrived, and how they had had a nice fowl for supper and a bottle of Marsala—as Miss Carrington did not take tea—and how the lady and her servant were both made comfortable for the night.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HERBALIST'S SHOP.

THE shop of Mr. Cornelius Vampi stood in a noisy crowded thoroughfare in the vicinity of Tottenham-Court Road. The street in which Mr. Vampi's residence was situated was one of those which are only to be found in poor neighbourhoods, and which are characterised by extreme stagnation during the day-time and a mighty confusion and stir after night-fall. It was one of those streets in which itinerant vendors of vegetables, fried-fish, periwinkles, and other necessities of the poor man's life, have constituted to themselves the right of establishing their stalls in a long line on the edge of the foot-way, with a distinct intention of rivalling their competitors in the shops, at whose very doors they have planted their barrows, and underselling them as far as that is possible in so cheap a neighbourhood.

There seem to be, however, customers enough for both. On a Saturday night the shops on either side of the way, and the two lines of stalls facing the shops, have both of them plenty of customers, and appear both to be doing a brisk business, if a cheap. Perhaps the stalls get, on the whole, the most custom. Their owners make so much noise, are so confident in the goodness of their own wares, are so importunate with the passers-by, have such an insinuating way of thrusting a handful of onions or a bunch of greens under the noses of hesitating housewives, that it is almost impossible to resist their wiles, without at least falling a victim to the extent of a few lettuces or a bundle of turnips. It is a curious, bewildering scene; and the flare of the candles screened with paper, which belong to the itinerants, and of the gas-jets with no screens at all, which blaze and roar in the open shops, make the place quite as light as it is in the (November) daylight, not to say a good deal lighter. Meantime the costermongers roar to you as you pass; the butchers in front of their houses solicit your patronage in the most emphatic terms; and the ballad-singer, with the group of children and the watchful eye,

contributes his dismal note to swell the general uproar.

It has been said that in the thoroughfare with which we have to do the rows of stalls are ranged in front of the shops, and are distinctly intended to compete with them for public favour and patronage; and it is in this point that Mr. Cornelius Vampi has an advantage over his neighbours. There are no costermongers in Mr. Vampi's line; for Mr. Vampi is a herbalist and a seedsman, and a seller of corn-plasters and of all sorts of drugs; and he has even a plaster-cast of a horse in his window, to intimate that medicines adapted to the stomachs of the inferior animals may be obtained at his emporium; while as to the lozenges for coughs, and lozenges for dyspepsia, and for any other human or inhuman ailment which can be conceived, they even rival the collection of boxes of ointment which always abound to so alarming an extent in the poorer neighbourhoods of the metropolis.

But it must not be supposed that Mr. Vampi's shop was, in the strict sense of the word, a chemist's shop. There were no red and green and amber-coloured bottles in the window, nor was there any coloured lamp

over the door, nor any intimation in words to suggest that the business was a druggist's. "Cornelius Vampi, Herbalist," was all that was inscribed, and that in letters which were obscure from dirt and antiquity. Nor was the inside of the shop more suggestive of pharmacy than the exterior. Where were the rows of brilliant bottles labelled "Sp. Mind." or "Tinct. Ammon."? or the drawers, "Pulv. Col." and "Carb. Sod."? Where were the glass-cases full of perfumery, and soaps, and dentifrices, and pastilles? There were none of these. No china jars of leeches, no mahogany *hall-chairs*,—always, for inexplicable reasons, so much affected by chemists,—no lemonade-bottles, no gazogene ready to pump out soda-water for the thirsty. Lastly, there was no pale, mild-eyed, gentlemanly creature, dressed in black, and wearing a white apron and spectacles, behind the counter, ready to give you advice gratis, or to pull out your tooth in the back-shop.

Mr. Cornelius Vampi's shop was a herbalist's shop; and this you certainly felt very strongly when you got inside it. The herbs stared you in the face in every direction, and look where you would. They hung—these were the com-

moner kinds—in masses from the ceiling; they reposed on shelves all round the shop in bundles, neatly labelled. You felt that all the little drawers were full of them; indeed, most of these drawers were inscribed—and that in plain English—with names that left no doubt:—St. John's wort, hedge-hyssop, celandine, monk's-hood, rue, holy thistle, and the like. Nor were these the only curiosities in which this strange warehouse abounded. There were bones shadowed forth in obscure corners,—bones of the elk, skulls of horses and dogs, a complete skeleton of a cat, and sundry glass-jars containing objects impossible to identify preserved in spirits. All seemed jumbled too in inextricable confusion; but yet it is a fact that Mr. Cornelius Vampi knew perfectly well where to lay his hand upon any thing that he wanted, from the stuffed alligator to the jar of snails, to which his celebrated corn-plaster was so largely indebted.

But not more different was Mr. Cornelius Vampi's shop from that of a chemist and druggist than was Mr. Vampi himself from the smug gentleman who has been described above. He was a tall, powerfully-built man, with a large abdomen, and the jolliest red

face that ever was seen. It did you good only to see him smile, and to hear the rich loud tones of his jolly voice. This man had been gifted with a perfectly well-ordered nature; and all the wheels of his machinery worked so glibly and so easily, that a degree of serenity was the result, which compelled him at times, as he once informed an intimate friend, "to wear a scrubbing-brush next his skin, because he was too happy."

And perhaps it would be a difficult thing to find a happier man than our friend the herbalist. Entirely absorbed in a number of occupations, all to him of surpassing interest; distracted by these and by the numerous experiments of a medical sort connected with the herbs in which he dealt, and in whose virtues he was a profound believer; applied to continually by the poor people in this poor neighbourhood for advice in their ailments,—for they all believed in him implicitly, and got benefit from the very tone of the man's mind, if not from his medicaments,—Mr. Cornelius was occupied every moment of his life, and that in a manner entirely congenial to his tastes. Nor was this all. In addition to his medical studies, there was another kind of

knowledge in the pursuit of which our friend was even more eager than in hunting out the hidden virtues of his favourite herbs. Cornelius Vampi was an astrologer.

Strange as this announcement may appear, it was nevertheless true that here was a man keeping a shop in a poor street in the metropolis, and in the nineteenth century, who was yet a profound believer in the stars, and in their influence for good or evil on the lives of his fellow-citizens.

He had at the top of that very house, of which the herbalist's shop formed the lower part, a garret, which he had converted into a sort of observatory, and from which on clear nights he was able to study all the planets, making his combinations and deductions therefrom entirely to his own satisfaction. Here too, and on his favourite hobby, he had not hesitated to lay out money. He had got a telescope of very fair power, mounted on a stand, a celestial globe, and all sorts of expensive instruments; while the walls were decorated with charts showing the situations of the heavenly bodies, besides a row of bookshelves, on which were displayed the works of Copernicus and Newton cheek-by-jowl—for

Cornelius combined the sciences of astrology and astronomy—with his favourites, Albertus Magnus and Cornelius Agrippa.

All the time that our good friend Vampi could spare from his shop-duties below was devoted to the prosecution of his favourite studies in the observatory above. Here he sat late in the night at work; for he could do with little sleep, and his Herculean strength seemed to set weariness at defiance. Here he consulted the stars in the interests of those persons—a much more numerous class than might have been supposed—who came to consult him as to their future careers. Here, having once got the day and hour of the nativities of his different clients, he was able to ascertain what fortunes and misfortunes were in store for them; when and under what circumstances their matrimonial career was to begin, and how it was likely to prosper; when danger was to be apprehended, and when an avalanche of prosperity and happiness. He would seriously warn one against going near water on a certain day, for instance, and would quote his own example as corroborative of the warning; relating how on a certain day, when his own horoscope had foretold that he should

be in danger by water, he had shut himself up in his room, determined not to stir out of it all day; how he had been sent for at a certain hour to the shop to attend to a matter which was beyond the province of his assistant; how he had, in his haste, kicked over a pail of water which was standing on the stairs, and being kept some time with no opportunity of changing his wet shoes and stockings, had caught an inflammation of the lungs, which had well-nigh finished him. He would tell another that on the day after to-morrow he must be on his guard against the animal creation, which was dead against him on that day, and would caution his client not so much as to get into an omnibus, or cross over the street, or caress a dog or a cat, during the twenty-four hours.

All these predictions and warnings he would back up by quotations from the horoscope of the particular individual with whose destiny he happened to be concerned—quotations couched in terms wholly unintelligible to the many; mystifying statements about “Mercury breaking into the house of Mars,” and other jargon of the craft. Nor did it in the least affect the reputation of our sage, or

diminish his own confidence in his powers of vaticination, when these prophecies failed utterly to be fulfilled. For was it not always possible to say — yes, and to believe, for Cornelius was an honest man—that adverse influences had been suddenly brought to bear, or that his client had, under his direction, been able so to act as to defeat the malignant intentions of the inimical planets?

Such was the individual whose ruddy countenance showed behind the counter of the herbalist's shop which has just been described, on a certain Saturday evening in early December. It was a wet, sloppy evening, when all the lamps in all the shops and at all the stalls, besides the street-lamps themselves, were reflected in the pavement and the puddles, giving a double brilliancy to the scene. Evening, and especially Saturday evening, was a busy time in the herbalist's shop; and both Cornelius himself and his assistant—a youth of eighteen, whom our friend would insist on calling “boy”—were kept actively at work till a late hour in the evening. On Saturday evenings such streets as that in which Vampi resided are so full of booths, where not only the necessaries but the luxu-

ries of poor life are retailed, that they look almost as if a fair were being held in them; and the poor are lured on to commit wild excesses in the excitement of the moment, indulging in sheep's-trotters for supper, even with the prospect before them of a roast-joint from the "bake-us" next day. And on this particular night, too, the poor man has time to think of his ailments. This is the night when the fact that he is "bad in his inside" may be confronted, and it is now that the rheumatic limb may get a chance of being duly embrocated and rubbed.

Our herbalist's shop was pretty well filled. Here was a gardener wanting to buy seeds; a boy with a swelled face looking rueful. By the counter stood a grave, worn-looking woman, with an empty bottle in her hand; another, with a sick child in her arms, was exhibiting the little thing's wasted leg to the learned astrologer.

"She don't seem to get a bit stronger," the poor woman said.

"No, poor little morsel," replied our philosopher sympathetically, "nor ever will, while you bring her out on such a night as this. Why it's death to her, my good woman.

Take her home, take her home, as fast as you can go, and get her warm, and give her a cup of warm broth if you can manage it. Ah, you can't."

The poor woman shook her head sorrowfully. "No, Mr. Vampi, not to-night, I'm afraid."

"Ah, then, give her a little gruel; here's a packet of grits; you can pay for it next week, you know. And here—take these herbs"—the astrologer had been making up a collection all this time—"and let them boil gently for a couple of hours in a quart of water, and then pour it off and give her two table-spoonfuls three times a day, and be sure you keep her indoors and warm, and don't bring her next time you come.—Now, ma'am, what's for you?"

This was addressed to a very little girl, who, speaking in a very loud voice, and producing a very large empty bottle, imperatively demanded:

"Ha'p'orth of klorrid of lime, please; and I've been to Mr. Squills's, and he said he didn't make ha'p'orths, so I thought I'd come here."

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure, but what

he was right," replied Cornelius good-humouredly; "a ha'p'orth will be uncommonly little, you know, miss."

The young lady was nothing abashed. "Well, make as large a ha'p'orth as you can," she said; "for mother says the drains is awful, and she feels quite sick."

And having received what she wanted, and paid for it on the spot, the little woman departed in triumph, hugging her bottle.

A young girl, who might have been a milliner's apprentice, or perhaps the daughter of a small tradesman, was waiting her turn. Mr. Vampi was occupied with the gardener for the moment.

"Ah, you'll find those bulbs turn out magnificent, I know. I wish I could find time to go out to your place and see them when they're in flower. Yes, and here's the mignonette-seed.—And here, boy," he continued, addressing the assistant, "get down some of those Dutch bulbs, and show them to Mr. Green, while I attend to this young lady.—Ah, my good girl, I haven't had time yet to finish your horoscope, but I've begun it."

“And how do you think it looks, Mr. Vampi?”

“Well, you know, it seems a pretty good average one. There’s a difficult bit or two to get over. Mercury’s sadly against you; but I’m just seeing my way to an intervention on the part of Jupiter, who’s very friendly, and as long as there’s no coalition with Taurus, you may do very well yet. But you musn’t be in a hurry, you know; I always like to do these things thoroughly, and I’m a great deal occupied just now, besides being in difficulties myself with the Ursa Major, who’s got a regular spite against me; so, you see, you must be patient, and you musn’t hurry me.”

“And when may I come again, Mr. Vampi?”

“O, in about a week, and perhaps then it may be ready; and in the mean time I’d caution you against having any thing to say to any body with red or even reddish hair; for Mars is looking uncommonly antagonistic, I can tell you.”

The young lady gave a little start at this last suggestion, and went on her way sorrowfully. However, she consoled herself as she crossed the threshold—“James is fair,” she

said in a low key; "but his 'air is not red, it's hauburn."

More and more customers came pouring in, and our friend was applied to for advice as to the treatment of "my good man's bad leg," or "Charley's measles," or "Sarah Jane's rash," or "Betsy Slovinger's" hair that was falling off, and all sorts of other tragedies and dilemmas. Out of all these our learned friend came triumphantly; but it was always when consulted upon matters of a less earthly nature that he seemed the most oracular and the most in his element. Nothing could exceed the certainty of conviction which characterised his expressions of opinion, or the zest with which he entered upon the subject. Nor were his disciples few in number, or always of the weaker sex, though it must be owned that these preponderated, and that such lords of the creation as were desirous of prying into hidden matters were generally afraid of the shop, and apt to seek secret interviews with the astrologer in his observatory upstairs.

On that Saturday night with which our narrative is concerned, and while the herbalist was most busy, the figure of a lady might

have been seen, if any one had taken the trouble to notice it, gazing in at the shop-window in an uneasy and wistful manner, and then looking about her as if undecided how to act. The lady was muffled up closely in a woollen shawl, and her face was covered with a veil the pattern of which was so thick and spreading that it was impossible to judge of her features with any accuracy. She seemed to want to enter the shop, and yet to hesitate about it, and would sometimes even walk a little way in another direction, and then return. On one of these occasions of her returning to the shop, she seemed at last to have made up her mind, and, not waiting to think any more about it, she turned swiftly in at the door and advanced to where the wise man, in a temporary lull of custom, was standing behind his counter absorbed in thought, and mounted no doubt upon his favourite hobby.

The lady made straight up to him, and they were soon engaged in a conversation apparently of some interest; but it was conducted in so low a key that only a word occasionally pronounced in the louder tones of the stalwart herbalist was at all audible.

Ultimately, and after a great many pros and cons, some preparation, on which a great deal of care had been bestowed, was handed over to the lady, who paid for what she had received at once, and left the shop closely veiled, as she had entered it.

CHAPTER V.

KEEPING HOUSE.

THE scene in the herbalist's shop, commemorated in the last chapter, is represented as having taken place in the month of December, whilst on reference to the chapter which preceded it, it will be found that the arrival of Miss Carrington in London occurred in November. There had been time in the interval for all the disagreeable qualities possessed by Miss Carrington and her amiable domestic to become fully developed, nor was it possible after that first night that Mrs. Penmore could keep her husband in ignorance of what was going on.

In the first place it was indispensable that the question of the little study upstairs, and its abdication by the legitimate owner, should be discussed, and this implied the necessity of touching on Miss Cantanker's peculiar temper, as shown in her announcement that she

neither could nor would remain in the apartment which had been originally prepared for her. So, by degrees it came out, that this good-natured person was likely to be then and always a source of great trouble and annoyance in the house. The luckless Gilbert, reckoning without his host, suggested that if Miss Cantanker did not like her quarters, Miss Cantanker might go; but here his wife was in a condition to set him right. "Her mistress," she said, "would as soon think of parting with her right hand as of dismissing her attendant, who had managed to get an ascendancy over her about which there could be no doubt. The two must go or stay together; there was no doubt about that."

And so it ended in the little study being confiscated, and poor Gilbert had to execute such work as he did at home either in his small dressing-room, which had no fireplace, or in the dining-room, when it was not wanted for other purposes.

Our young people were, unhappily, not successful in providing either mistress or maid with meals which were suited to their respective palates; and it must be freely acknowledged that the unfortunate Charlotte did seem

to have been struck with a sort of paralysis ever since the arrival of Miss Carrington and her confidential maid. This last especially appeared to have the power of reducing the poor servant-of-all-work to a state of temporary insanity by the mere fact of her being at times present in the kitchen. "I'm that flurried, mum," she said to her mistress, when trying on one occasion to excuse one of her worst failures,—“I'm that flurried when she comes nigh me, that I don't know a rump-steak from a mutton-chop.” The consequence of this state of things was, that certainly some very remarkable specimens of cookery did, from time to time, appear on table at the little house in Beaumont Street. Joints strangely combining a burnt-up outside with a raw inside, revealed at the very first cut; potatoes mealy without, but resembling bullets when attacked with the spoon; semolina puddings whose semolina had coagulated into hard lumps, refusing to have any thing to say to the mysterious and whey-like liquid which formed the main body of the pudding. The fact is, that the treatment applied by our artist to the raw material on which her powers were to be displayed was always of too fierce

and rapid a sort. Furious heat was applied, such as no food could stand long and exist. It did not stand it long, and in consequence was not done through. Hence the flesh of the fried sole was inseparable from the bones; while the cauliflower, beautiful to look at, was found, on inquiring within, to be raw and indigestible.

The wily Cantanker, indeed, was not the woman to allow her digestive faculties to be thus tampered with. She took all her meals in the room which she had succeeded in abstracting from its hapless owner, and as she prepared them with her own hands below, was continually to be met on the stairs carrying up some savoury and succulent morsel, wearing at the same time the expression of countenance of a martyr in some great cause. This remarkable person was also always ready to take in hand the preparation of any article or articles of food of which it was distinctly understood that her mistress alone was to be partaker. She would make Miss Carrington's breakfast in the morning, poaching her eggs, and cooking her toast with the greatest care, and she would also insist on making the broth, a cup of which her mistress always consumed

the last thing at night ; but with the dinner she would have nothing to do. “ Mr. and Mrs. Penmore,” she would say, “ partook of that meal, and she was not going to roast herself before the fire for them.” So the dinners were handed over to be exclusively cared for by Mrs. Penmore’s *cordon-bleu*.

It was the practice of Miss Carrington at times entirely to ignore the deficiencies of the servant-of-all-work, and to act upon a preconceived idea that there was a professed cook in the house. Thus she would send for Gabrielle in the morning, and saying that she felt rather poorly just then, would ask it as a favour that the dinner might be one tolerably suited to a delicate stomach. “ I don’t want any thing very wonderful,” she would say ; “ a little clear soup, a croquette, and some game ; I really feel as if that would do me good, and as if there was nothing else that I could eat.” Then would Mrs. Penmore descend into the lower regions, and would herself—for it got to that at last—attempt, with the aid of a cookery-book and with Charlotte, to do the rough work, the compilation of the delicacies demanded by her guest. But the cookery-book bewildered instead of helping her, and left so much unsaid,

besides saying so much that was unintelligible, that poor Gabrielle was at times almost inclined in her desperation to go off in search of the author, to put a few questions to him or her on matters left unexplained in the text. And then this cookery-book seemed to expect that those who consulted it were to be possessed of such enormous wealth. The author thought nothing of directing you to "take the breasts of five partridges" to form only one ingredient in a dish which would also require "the yolks of twelve plovers' eggs, a handful of truffles," and sundry other delicacies equally costly; whilst as to the amount of chicken-broth and of beef-stock which you must have by you before you even attempted a clear soup, that alone implied a princely income. Also the book expected too much knowledge in the reader, and took it for granted that he was acquainted with things of which, in the present case at any rate, "the reader" was totally ignorant.

The consequence of all this was, that our inexperienced little housewife was fain to make the most hazardous compromises in obeying the instructions put before her. Any particular process which she could not understand,

she omitted. Any peculiarly extravagant element in the composition with which she was engaged she left out or administered homœopathically; while those ingredients which were more within the reach of her small means would be enforced with such undue emphasis as to interfere sadly with the harmony of the whole. As to appealing to Charlotte for advice in any of these difficulties, that was leaning upon a broken reed with a vengeance.

“Look here, Charlotte,” the poor lady would say helplessly; “they tell us to ‘take a table-spoonful of sauce No. 2, see page 16,’ and then a ‘tea-spoonful of sauce No. 8,’ see some other page; but what are we to do if we haven’t got them?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, mum.”

“Do you think you could make No. 2, while I prepare the rest? Let us see. ‘It is best to prepare this sauce in rather a large quantity, so that you may have it by you. Take a bottle of the best claret wine and pour it over half-a-dozen trussed ortolans, which you will have ready in the bottom of a saucepan; add the juice of two limes—be particular that they are not large ones—and a handful of pistaccio-nuts tied up in a bag. Then grate a

nutmeg over the whole; but in this (as a little more or less than the right amount will spoil the sauce) you must be guided by your own discretion—' ”

“ O, if you please, mum, I'd rather not try that.”

“ No, I should think not, Charlotte. I'm afraid we must give that up altogether. But the worst of it is, that they all seem one as impossible as another, and *so* expensive. What are we to do ?”

“ I'm sure I don't know, mum.”

“ Well, I suppose we must do as well as we can.” And then commenced the system of compromises spoken of above.

But the great canons of art are not to be thus lightly trifled with. When the dishes, which had been prepared in so unprincipled a manner, came to table, they were apt to be entirely wanting in flavour, and to present an ugly and unappetising appearance to the eye. Now Miss Carrington was not the person to eat what was set before her and make no complaint; far from it. One of two results invariably attended these culinary failures: either Miss Carrington viewed the meal at which she was assisting in a ludicrous point of view, and

lashed the different dishes, so to speak, with sarcasms; or she declined to eat at all, and assumed the airs of a martyr who is being gradually starved to death.

“Why, what on earth is this?” she would say, after turning the contents of her plate over for some time with her fork. It was in this case a dish of Gabrielle’s own invention; a mince-up of veal and ham enclosed in batter, like fritters, and fried. Poor thing, how she had thought over it in the night, and determined to make it a *chef-d’œuvre*!

“Is it fish?” inquired Miss Carrington innocently.

Gabrielle mentioned the nature of the composition, and felt, I am not ashamed to say, wounded to the core.

“I’m sure it’s exceedingly nice,” remarked Gilbert, who always stood by his dear West Indian.

“Do you know it really *is* rather nice,” observed Miss Carrington in a patronising tone. And she actually managed to eat a little bit, leaving half a plateful untouched, of course.

Penmore, in a somewhat vindictive spirit, called for the dish again, and helped himself freely.

"I'm afraid you don't like it," said Gabrielle, addressing her guest.

"O, on the contrary, I assure you it's quite nice.—*You* seem to like it, at any rate, Gilbert," she said, addressing her cousin.

"I do, I can tell you."

"The fact is," continued the lady, "that I'm not very hungry to-day ; not *now*, at any rate."

Such words as these would have the effect of irritating in an excessive degree the temper of the unhappy Gilbert, and it often took him some time to get round sufficiently for purposes of general conversation.

"Why, you are eating nothing," he said presently.

"I really have no appetite," replied the martyr. "I daresay I shall be hungry by and by, and you'll bring me some broth, Jane, won't you?" This was addressed to Miss Cantanker, whom her mistress, when she wished to be particularly amiable, would address by her Christian name.

"Yes, miss," replied the acid one, highly satisfied ; "cup of nice 'ot broth."

This good lady always waited upon her mistress at table, but on no one else. In fact, it was her business, one would say, to ignore

Mr. and Mrs. Penmore altogether, and to act as if she was not aware of their existence. And as far as Gabrielle was concerned, Miss Carrington followed on the same side, always addressing herself to Gilbert in conversation, and especially when there was any thing that she wanted done. The young lawyer was, however, too much for her in this way, invariably referring the matter, whatever it might be, back to his wife, and so making it compulsory on Miss Carrington to recognise the presence of her hostess, whether she liked it or not.

“O, Gilbert,” she said on one occasion, “I’ve got such a hard pillow upstairs; wouldn’t it be possible to let me have a softer one?”

“My dear Diana”—this, by the bye, was Miss Carrington’s euphonious Christian name—“My dear Diana, I must remind you that Gabrielle is the proper person to apply to about such matters, about which I am entirely ignorant.”

But it would be an uncongenial task to me to record at length all the humiliating and painful things which our poor Gabrielle had to put up with at the hands of her tormentor; and yet it would be difficult to say whether Mrs. Penmore felt them more keenly than her

husband. It was he certainly who resented them the most, and who retaliated the most severely in words. Gabrielle had her husband to think of, and that helped her to bear; and only once or twice was she betrayed into an angry word or two under excessive pressure. She had to ask Miss Carrington, for instance, on one occasion, to speak to her when she had any complaints to make about household matters, and not to apply to Gilbert, who had troubles enough already of his own. Then Miss Carrington, who shared her domestic's hatred for the wretched maid-of-all-work, would pounce out upon the unhappy Charlotte on the staircase, and tell her not to make so much noise in the room overhead, as really her nerves could not stand it. Or she would send down hostile messages to this functionary through Miss Cantanker, and Mrs. Penmore would find the girl in floods of tears, with her head buried in her arms, and these supported on the kitchen table. This of course had to be spoken about, and "miching malicho" was naturally the result. Miss Carrington would complain too from time to time of the want of servants in the house. She had had no idea that they only kept one domestic, and it was

extremely inconvenient, because, in consequence of this deficiency of attendants, so much additional trouble fell to the lot of her faithful Cantanker. The faithful Cantanker was always present on these occasions, and ever ready to put her oar in on her mistress's side, till called to order by the lady herself, when she was fain to fall back upon malignant glaring. Indeed, in this she excelled to an uncommon extent. Her eyes were never off Mrs. Penmore when they were in the same room, and she seemed to listen with a fixed and venomous intensity to every word that the poor lady uttered. Nor was it only when palpably present that this amiable woman listened. She was continually being discovered outside doors and in passages where she had no business; but she wore ever on these occasions such a look of indignant virtue, and presented at such times—as always—so injured an appearance, that it was quite impossible any suspicion could attach to her.

So the days passed, and every day that dawned brought with it its full measure of trouble. Meanwhile our young couple consoled themselves and each other with their great mutual love, and were not all unhappy.

CHAPTER VI.

MASTER AND MAN.

GILBERT PENMORE had a friend, to whom he really did not hesitate to apply that much-abused title, in the person of Julius Lethwaite, of the Inner Temple, barrister-at-law, not practising. Penmore had become acquainted with him when they were both eating their terms together, and they had gradually got to be, first, acquaintances, and ultimately, even friends. Lethwaite had a great belief in Gilbert, and was firmly convinced that one of these days he would certainly distinguish himself and rise to eminence. For himself he did not care. He was only nominally a barrister, and had never intended to practise, having, indeed, a share in a certain business which was carried on, as he would say, "somewhere in the City," and in the conduct of which he never interfered. He had a confidential clerk, who watched his interests in connection with that

same business, and who demanded occasional interviews with his patron, in the course of which he would put a great many very difficult questions to Mr. Julius, as the old man called him; and finding his superior quite unable to answer them, would be under the necessity of providing the replies himself, which he invariably did.

It was one of Mr. Lethwaite's most remarkable characteristics, that he always impugned or pretended to impugn human motive. He said that he did not believe in an action done with a good motive, and he would sometimes puzzle himself by the hour together, and bewilder all his faculties in his endeavours to find out what—whether in his own case or that of others—could have been the real actuating cause of some act which wore a fair outside, but which he pretended must really have been performed with a selfish intention. It was a sort of monomania this with him, and how it had originated no one could tell; though there were those who could not help believing that a feeling so little in accordance with Lethwaite's real good-nature must have been generated by some act of special treachery of which he had once been the victim.

This man's nature was an uncommon one. His unbelief as to the purity of the motives which actuated the conduct of his fellow-men had not by any means the effect of making him either gloomy or morose, on the contrary. He seemed to have made up his mind to the thing. It was in his opinion one of the conditions of our existence—this defectiveness of motive—and we must just put up with it. Sometimes too he would puzzle himself by the hour together in trying to find out what could be at the bottom of some act of courtesy of which he had been the object. "That fellow was most extraordinarily civil to me to-day," he would say to himself, reflecting on the behaviour of a certain grumpy servant who held office in his Inn of Court—"most remarkably so. I wonder now what he could have been driving at. There must have been some reason for it, for ordinarily he's a beast. I wonder what he's after?" and so he would go on twisting and turning the subject over in his mind till at last a solution would suddenly flash upon him. "Ay, ay, ay," he would then exclaim, with some of the joy which a hunter feels when he has succeeded in tracking his game: "I see it all. We are in the month

of December, and its getting near Christmas.” Such a solution of the difficulty as this—probably, in this case, the right one—would afford the keenest satisfaction to our friend, confirming him in his theory more fixedly than ever.

As to his own bad intentions, Mr. Lethwaite had no sort of doubt about them. If he was sometimes put to it to discover those of others, being impeded by their unwillingness to come forward openly and acknowledge them, he had no such difficulty in his own case. Here, at any rate, was his own heart open to him. He could gaze down into it with piercing eyes and hunt among all its darkest corners for the vile traitor who sought to avoid him. There should be no deception here, he thought, at any rate. Alas, there was more deception here, perhaps, than any where else! Here, perhaps, were his suspicions applied the most cruelly of all. For it was a good heart that he injured when he ransacked its every corner in his determination to find out that it meant badly, and he often deceived himself, in a manner to which most of us are little prone, in arriving at conclusions infinitely derogatory to his own better nature—conclusions

which made him out a perfect villain in his own eyes.

Nor did even this habit of self-suspicion tend altogether to sour or embitter the disposition of this singular individual. He had made up his mind that he was incapable of doing any thing except, at best, from a mixed motive, and he must just bear it. If he had had an ugly nose, he would say to himself, or if he had been marked with the small-pox, he would not have ignored the thing, or smashed the looking-glass that told of the fact; and so it should be with the defects of his character: at least he would face them. And he did face them, and in doing so, in hunting out these half-chimerical deformities and disfigurements, he lost sight entirely of a hundred rare and unselfish qualities which any unprejudiced person would have been able to point out to him.

On the morning with which we are now concerned, Mr. Julius Lethwaite sat in his chambers reading the newspaper after breakfast, and expecting a visit from his confidential clerk. Mr. Lethwaite was a good-looking though not what is called a handsome man. He was rather tall and rather thin; he had no colour; and though his features were irregular,

his was yet a perfectly successful appearance, more so than that of many a man who is called—and, on examination, really is—handsome. He was not liable to disastrous chances as regarded his personal appearance; and by this it is meant that he did not freckle, that he never had a red nose, that he did not splutter forth into fits of laughter, though he had a sufficiently keen sense of humour, as was evidenced by the lines of his mouth and a little wrinkle near one corner of that feature which was permanent and very full of expression. He was older than his friend Gilbert by many years, and had reached years of discretion, by which I mean that he was now thirty-five.

The room in which our cynic was seated was an essentially comfortable one. There were hardly any chairs but easy ones. There were striped Arab curtains to the windows. There were plenty of books on the book-shelves, periodicals and newspapers every where, a blazing fire, and the remains of a very satisfactory breakfast on the table. In one corner of the room, close to a window, was a small table, on which were all the materials used in the trade of watchmaking,—for it was one of our friend's peculiarities that he had a great

fancy for that occupation. Indeed, he had been engaged off and on in the construction of a watch for about eight years, and had made nothing of it yet.

Mr. Lethwaite was sitting in a large leather chair turned round towards the fire, and was taking occasional doses of the newspaper, resting between whiles to reflect; an occupation which I can strongly recommend to those who have got nothing to do.

“I cannot think,” he said to himself, “in the course of one of these pauses, “I cannot think what can make this man”—and he mentioned the name of a well-known philanthropist—“give up his time to such infinitely disagreeable pursuits as poking about in poor neighbourhoods, inhaling nasty smells, encountering nasty sights, talking to people an inch thick in dirt, and full of disease into the bargain, so that he runs the risk of infection continually; when he really is not obliged to do any of these things. It is very extraordinary—*most* extraordinary,” he continued, musingly. “I’ll tell you what,” he continued, sitting up suddenly in his chair, “it must be that he likes it. There’s no other way of accounting for it. He likes bad smells and

horrible sights — that's it. I knew a man once who liked having his teeth out—just as I like watch-making. And then these people flatter him, and"—

Here he was interrupted in his reflections by a lively tap at the door; and on his calling to the tapper to come in, a little man, about sixty years of age, with twinkling spectacles and a smile, came briskly into the room, smiling and bowing and pulling off his brown gloves as he advanced towards the fire-place.

"Good morning, sir, good morning," said the little man, as Lethwaite rose and shook him by the hand. "Studying our commercial interests in the newspapers, I see. Can't do better, sir; can't do better."

He was a small, neat, highly-finished old man this, with eyes that were very bright, and beamed kindly over his glasses, while his mouth, which when he was not speaking was tightly closed, was ornamented with a continual placid smile. He was buttoned up tightly in a small greatcoat—if the expression may be permitted—and had left a pair of goloshes on the mat outside, so that his shoes were as clean as if he had just come out of his bedroom, though it was a muddy day outside

notwithstanding. His name was comfortable, like his appearance. It was Goodrich—Jonathan Goodrich.

“Nothing of the sort, Goodrich, nothing of the sort,” replied his patron, in allusion to the strong commercial feeling which the man of business had given him credit for. “On the contrary, I was reading just what came uppermost, and especially all the most frivolous matter that I could by any possibility pick out. Why don’t you sit down?”

“Ah! never tell me,” returned the little man, obeying his employer’s suggestion; “never tell me. You wouldn’t be able to give such important hints as you do in connection with the business, if you didn’t give your attention to commerce, ay, and that pretty closely too, sir. But O, sir, how I do wish that you’d come down now and then to the office, and superintend things a bit yourself. There’s many a question turns up there in the course of the day which I ain’t competent to give an opinion on; and then Mr. Gamlin, he acts in it on his own responsibility, and it isn’t right, sir. It isn’t, indeed; for you’re the principal, as you know; it’s ‘Leth-

waite and Gamlin,' and not Gamlin and Lethwaite."

"But, my dear Goodrich," urged the sleeping partner, "you know it's to Mr. Gamlin's interest to engage only in what's profitable to the firm, just as much as it's mine."

"Ah, sir, that's all very well; but you ought to be on the spot, sir, indeed you ought. For there isn't always time, when a question has to be answered, for me to come up here and put it before you; and then, as I said, Mr. Gamlin has to act simply on his own responsibility; and he's too fond of speculating, sir, that's what I say; and too fond of American securities, and it's a country—is America—where you may have a crash at any time, and then where are you? that's what I say, sir."

"And you speak with considerable prudence, no doubt, my good Jonathan, though with too much mistrust of your namesakes over the water. But you may depend upon it that Mr. Gamlin knows well enough what he's about."

"Well, then, Mr. Julius," the old clerk went on, "he's been and bought up ever so much American cotton, and it's left there in

warehouse; and it's dangerous, sir, you may depend upon it, with things looking so queer over there; and now he's proposing to buy I don't know how many bales more; and I thought that transactions on such a scale ought not to go on, and you, the head partner, knowing nothing about it. So I thought I'd just step round and speak to you on the subject, and warn you of what's going on, sir, and that we are involved much too deeply in these American undertakings."

"Well, Goodrich, I am disposed to think you're right in that idea, and I authorise you, if there is still time, to enter my protest against any further transactions with the Yankees just at present."

"There now," cried the old man triumphantly, "there's an opinion worth having; nobody like the head of the firm for right thinking and right acting; that's what I say."

"Don't give *me* credit for it, you old goose," replied the patron good-humouredly; "you know that it was your own idea, and that you are praising yourself all this time."

"Nothing of the sort, sir; nothing of the sort. You come in and knock the nail on the head directly you take the hammer in hand.

Ah, sir, if you would but make the Lethwaite, in 'Lethwaite and Gamlin,' the working partner instead of the sleeping partner, we might do then."

"Nonsense, Goodrich, nonsense; we do very well as it is. I should spoil every thing; and do remember, once for all, my good friend, that it's Mr. Gamlin's interest as much as mine that we should prosper—and there's nothing like self-interest."

"I don't know that, sir," replied Jonathan doggedly.

"You do, you aggravating old rascal, you know that every thing's done in this world with a selfish motive."

"I don't know any thing of the kind, sir."

"Yes, you do."

"No, I don't. And I'll tell you what, sir, as I've often told you before, that the sooner you get those notions out of your head the better, for they're misleading you, sir; if you'd allow me the liberty of saying so. Why, do you mean to tell me, Mr. Julius, that when I had that long illness, and Mr. Gamlin thought it was useless keeping me on, as I couldn't attend to my duties, and you came forward and insisted that I should be left in my post—

do you mean to tell me that that was done with a selfish motive?"

"Yes, I do. You're obstinate, and unmanageable, and pig-headed; but in spite of all that you are useful to me, and you understand me, and you may depend upon it that that was at the bottom of any effort I may have made to keep you in your place."

"Ah, sir, it's no use talking to you, as I well know," replied the old boy in a despairing tone; "and I suppose it was with the same selfish motive that you came to look after me so often."

"Why, of course it was."

"And that you brought all sorts of good things, like fowls and jellies"—

"The same motive, beyond a doubt."

"And sherry wine"—

"Always the same, Jonathan, always the same. I wanted you, and was anxious to see you back at your desk; so of course I did what I could to get your strength up."

"There, there, sir, I've done; and now, with your leave, I'll take my departure."

"Not till you've had a glass of that same 'sherry-wine,' Jonathan, which did you so much good before."

“Not a drop, sir, not a drop, at this time of the day; why, I should be good for nothing all the afternoon. No, sir, I’ll just go back to the office as fast as I can, and express the views with which you’ve kindly favoured me. So, good morning, Mr. Julius, good morning; and may you think better of it, sir, and come down and pay us a visit in the City before many days are over.” And the old clerk trotted away through the great bustling town, with a countenance in which were depicted great cunning and importance. For was he not the deputed agent of the head partner in Lethwaite and Gamlin’s? did he not actually represent the principal in the firm? and was he not now conveying a message from no less a person than Mr. Julius Lethwaite to no less a person than Mr. Morley Gamlin?

So the old boy might well wear an appearance of astuteness and mystery, as indeed he did, looking on the passers-by with a feeling almost of commiseration for their lot in not being engaged like himself in matters of so much moment.

Meanwhile his employer had sunk back once more in his great leathern chair, and had fallen into one of his accustomed reveries. “I

wonder," he said to himself, "what can make that old fellow so much in earnest about my affairs? Is it gratitude for what he was talking of just now—gratitude for the sherry and the calves-foot jelly—a real interest in my welfare? Ah, I wish I could think so, but I'm afraid it won't do. His own interest is bound up with mine: if I prosper, he prospers; if I go down, he goes down. It's no use trying to ignore it; that diabolical self-interest shows itself every where and ruins every thing." He sat a little while longer occupied with similar reflections; and then he started up suddenly, and prepared to go out.

"I'll go and pay Cornelius Vampi a visit," he said, as he put on his hat, "and get some philosophy out of him."

For it must be known that Mr. Lethwaite and Cornelius Vampi were great allies.

CHAPTER VII.

NEITHER A DINNER OF HERBS NOR A STALLED OX.

It was really a curious thing as a study to observe how profound a mistress of the art of being disagreeable was our friend Miss Carrington. To her own friends who came to see her she would complain (whenever she could do so before the unfortunate Gabrielle) of the inconveniences which she had to endure. Miss Carrington's friends in London were not numerous; but they made up for it in spitefulness. They were always trying to make her alter her plans; and one lady especially, who was known by the name of Preedy, was always persuading her dear friend to remove to a certain boarding-house near at hand, where she—Miss Preedy—had resided for upwards of a twelvemonth.

“You've no idea,” Miss Preedy would say, “what good company we are. We're never dull; our meals are feasts in season, with the

flowing bowl.” (There seems reason to believe that in saying these words Miss Preedy imagined herself to be making use of a well-known quotation.) “And then,” she would continue, “we are all well connected, you know,—people with whom you would not be ashamed to be seen talking. There’s General Scrope, who heads the table,—a man whom any body might be proud to know. And such conversation—such flow of anecdote as that man possesses! Then there’s Lady Groves,—charming person; hires her brougham almost every day, and keeps it standing at the door a good three-and-sixpenny-worth of the time, and giving quite a distinguished aspect to the house. Though as to carriages, there are times when you’ll see as many as three or four before the door at once, and the horses champing their bits make it all look quite aristocratic. Now come and live among us, Diana dear, and you’ll see how you’ll be understood and made much of.—And I’m sure Mrs. Penmore wouldn’t mind, would you, ma’am? You know you’d easily get another lodger.”

To which Mrs. Penmore, turning very red, would reply, “That Miss Carrington was a relation—a cousin, indeed, of Mr. Penmore’s,

and that if she saw any reason for changing her place of abode, she would have no successor." And then Mrs. Penmore would take an early opportunity of getting away out of the room, and would break her heart by herself in private.

"Seems rather proud, your relation," Miss Preedy would remark. "Ah, you may depend upon it, you'd be better with us in Wimpole Street, and so much more cheerful."

Or another kind of temptation would be held out by another of Miss Carrington's friends,—a widow this time, and one not bred at St. James's.

"Take a little 'ouse," this lady would suggest; "that's what I'd do, if I were you. A nice little 'ouse with your own things about you, and your own servants and your own way. I've got a little 'ouse myself, and I find it answer, and therefore it is that I recommend you to get one too. And here's Miss Cantanker here: I'm sure you agree with me, Jane, don't you?"

"Ah, mum," would be the reply of the personage thus appealed to, "and that you may be sure I do; and many and many's the time that I've begged and implored my mis-

tress to have a place of her own, and not be at the mussy of any body, be it who it may."

But Miss Carrington would always reply, with the air of a martyr, "That it could not be; that Mr. Penmore—she never alluded to Gabrielle, who, however, in this case would not be present—that Mr. Penmore was her relation; that his circumstances were somewhat embarrassed; and that she would not on any account withdraw her assistance, unless indeed any thing should occur that might make it inevitable. That she was altogether comfortable, or that her good Jane Cantanker was altogether comfortable, she could not, consistently with truth, assert; far from it. But she was determined to stick by her relative to the last; though if indeed circumstances should occur rendering a separation unavoidable, then she would certainly think of what her friend Miss Preedy, or her friend the widow-lady (as the case might be), had so kindly suggested."

Then at dinner-time, the period selected always for agreeable remarks, Miss Carrington would retail the substance of what had recently transpired, taking care to show plainly what an estimable character she was, and how she

was sacrificing her own comfort and advantage to that of her relatives. And here the virtuous Cantanker would be brought into the conversation, whenever her influence seemed likely to assist in backing her mistress up. This was one of the things which Penmore found the most difficult to endure of all. His detestation for Miss Cantanker was something ferocious, and hardly to be concealed. He said it took his appetite away to see her standing there behind her mistress's chair, watching every thing and listening to every thing, with her mistress appealing to her continually, and seeming to receive every word she said as if it fell from the lips of an oracle.

"I've had a gentleman visitor to-day," said Miss Carrington one day at dinner-time, and speaking with an infernal and aggravating sprightliness; "haven't I, Cantanker?"

"Yes, miss," replied the lady, slowly and sententiously, "a trew gentleman."

It is impossible to say how it was done; but it is certain that Miss Cantanker managed to convey in these words the impression that Gilbert was *not* a "trew gentleman."

"I thought I heard a heavier footstep than

usual on the stairs," remarked Gabrielle, who was always ready to talk on any subject that promised peacefully.

"What sharp ears you have!" retorted Miss Carrington. And then, with restored cheerfulness: "And a military gentleman, too; wasn't he, Jane?"

"Captain Shaver, 'alf-pay," replied Cantanker, in the same solemn tone, "and a terew gentleman."

"He's withdrawn from the service," continued Miss Carrington, "and has made quite a study of health, and medicine, and that sort of thing, and is really an authority. And he tells me that the aspect of my room is all wrong, and that I can never be well unless I am fronting the sun."

"I am afraid, as the house isn't upon castors, that we can't turn it round to the south, even to please Captain Shaver."

This was the remark of Mr. Penmore, who, if the truth must be owned, was disposed to be rather rude to his cousin at times. But then was there not cause, and was not the presence of Cantanker enough in itself to justify a small amount of incivility?

"There's your bedroom has the morning

sun upon it. You might make that your sitting-room, and use the other for a bedroom."

"O, but Captain Shaver says that a sunny aspect for one's bedroom is even more important than for one's sitting-room. Doesn't he, Cantanker?"

"That was his remark, miss," replied the domestic.

Gilbert, in confidence to his plate, expressed a wish that Captain Shaver might be somethinged. Aloud, he intimated that that made it very difficult, certainly.

"If you please, miss," remarked Cantanker, "there was likewise something which the gentleman observed with regard to the position which should be occupied by the bed of any one who was wishful to enjoy repose. Something about the Pole,—the curtain-pole was it?"

"O yes, of course there was, Cantanker; but it wasn't the curtain-pole, it was the North Pole. Gilbert, Captain Shaver says that it is impossible to be in good health unless your bed lies along the line of the polar current, running north and south. And then he got out a little compass, and I showed

him, by means of the sofa, how my bed was placed (for of course I was not going to admit him to my bedroom); and then he got himself in line with the sofa, and he consulted his compass; and then he cried out, turning quite pale as he spoke, 'Why, bless my heart, Miss Carrington, the article of furniture'—he was too delicate to call it a bed—"

"A terew gentleman," remarked Cantanker, *sotto voce*.

"The article of furniture under discussion,' he said, 'lies in a direct line east and west. I wonder, Miss Carrington, that you are alive.' That's what he said. His very words, weren't they, Cantanker?"

"Yes, miss; he said he wondered you was alive."

"Now, Gilbert, what's to be done?" asked the lady, as if she believed that another night of it would kill her.

"I should think that nothing was easier than to turn the 'article of furniture,' as your friend calls it, round at a right angle; but I must remind you that these are matters out of my province."

"Ah!" said Miss Carrington, coldly.

"If you'll explain what you want to me,

I will try to set it right," said poor Gabrielle. "But I do wish," she added, with pardonable irritability, "that you would apply to me about such things, and not to my husband."

Madame Cantanker made a note of these words, fixing her eyes on Gabrielle with a deadly venom. Meanwhile Miss Carrington remarked that "she really couldn't stop to consider every word, and to whom it ought to be addressed."

That night, when the young couple were alone, Gilbert cried out in the bitterness of his spirit, "This cannot go on; that woman must be got rid of."

But they were hardly alone, for Jane Cantanker was listening at the door. She heard a good deal that night. She heard Mrs. Penmore say, "O, Gilbert, she is so spiteful, and she says such bitter things on purpose. She makes me feel so wicked—almost as if I could kill her sometimes." And she heard her burst out sobbing and crying. These things Madame Cantanker heard; but she did not hear—because she got tired of waiting—how, half an hour afterwards, Gabrielle said to her husband, "O, Gilbert, but I didn't mean that I really was angry with her; and I

wouldn't hurt a hair of her head ; and you know that, don't you ? It's not much to bear, is it ?”

It was one of Miss Carrington's peculiarities that she was extremely variable, and so different at different times, that, to use a familiar phrase, “there was no knowing where to have her.” She seemed of late to have taken a wonderful fancy for her cousin, taking every opportunity of showing her predilection too, and remaining quite unshaken by the numerous rebuffs and snubs with which, as we have seen, Gilbert was in the habit of receiving her remarks ; for he really disliked the lady with a forty-cousin power, and probably her presence was almost more distressing to him than even to Gabrielle herself.

It may have been that this sudden regard which Miss Carrington began to manifest for her cousin was to some extent assumed, and put on in order to give annoyance, if possible, to Mrs. Penmore. Miss Carrington was, as has been said, good-looking ; and she was aware of it. She hated Gabrielle—though why, it would be difficult to say—and if it had been possible to inflict a pang in that direction, she would undoubtedly have been only too glad.

One day she produced a photograph of herself, for which she had been sitting. It was a good likeness; but what the artist who took it had gone through, who shall describe? Of course the man knew something of what he was about, and in arranging her attitude had to consider the defects inherent in the instrument, and to bear in mind that any one part of the sitter which came nearer to his lens than another must needs be exaggerated to twice its real size in the picture. This is why we all have to submit to be pinioned into all sorts of ungraceful positions when we sit for such likenesses. This is why we are fain to be so very unassuming in the pose of our legs, and to keep our elbows well back, lest our hands should assume gigantic proportions, and ruin the natural refinement of our aspect. But Miss Carrington was not to be easily drilled into submission. She had views of her own on the subject of attitude. She had a fine hand; and, determined to give prominence to this elegant extremity, she insisted on so placing it that it came out in the photograph about the size of the wooden hand which dangles still over the shop-fronts of some of our metropolitan glovers' shops. This photograph

had, of course, to be cancelled; and so had another, in which the lady appeared with a pantomimic head, not to speak of another with a gigantic nose; and yet another, where the skirts of the dress claimed a monopoly of space, so that the head and body of Miss Carrington were only seen in the distance, and bore no proportion at all to her lower extremities,—in short, it was a photograph of the lady's feet, and very large feet they seemed too, which, to do her justice, was not the case in reality. At last Miss Carrington was obliged to submit to professional knowledge, and the result was a very striking likeness of the lady in a somewhat constrained and unnatural attitude.

“There, Gilbert,” said Miss Carrington in a sentimental tone, and handing him one of the portraits; “there is something which I hope you will keep for old acquaintance’ sake.” She was always trying to hint that there had been some tender passages between them in former times, for which there was not the slightest foundation in fact, as indeed they had not met half a dozen times till now. Mrs. Penmore gave a little start as these words were spoken, but on Gilbert himself they were entirely lost.

“Ah! O yes,” he said. “Dear me, what a good likeness! Who did it?”

Miss Carrington replied that it was the work of a dreadful wretch named Grooper, in the Tottenham-Court Road.

“Well, at any rate it’s a very good likeness,—isn’t it, Gabrielle?” and he handed the work of art across to her, adding in entire good faith, “and you’d better take care of it, as I should be sure to lose it.”

Mrs. Penmore was just beginning to corroborate her husband’s opinion, when Miss Carrington suddenly started up from her place, and exclaiming, “Well, I think you might have pretended to care about it, at any rate,” went away to her room. She was closely followed by Jane Cantanker, who, however, turned a destructive glance in the direction of poor Gabrielle as she passed through the door.

“Is she mad?” inquired Gilbert of his wife when both the ladies had disappeared.

“You never cared for her?” asked Gabrielle.

Her husband burst into a roar of laughter. “I should think not,” he said; “nor she for me. Why, I’ve only seen her two or three times in my life.”

“It’s very extraordinary,” said Gabrielle. “She’s been so odd lately—sometimes violent and excited almost, and sometimes quite heavy and stupid, and refusing to come downstairs, or let any one see her but her maid. I hope she is not going to be ill. She certainly gets more capricious and strange every day.”

CHAPTER VIII.

CORNELIUS VAMPI AT HOME.

THERE were retained in the service of Mr. Cornelius Vampi, besides the youth who assisted in the herb-shop, an old man and his wife. These looked after the house, did what was necessary in the way of cooking, and made the beds,—functions which were performed by either one of them indifferently, as the case might be. Old Smaggsdale, or, as his master called him, “Smagg,” could make a bed or cook a dinner, at a pinch, as well as his wife; and would sometimes have to turn his hand to such matters when his better-half was engaged in cleaning the house down from top to bottom, which she invariably did whenever she felt disposed to be low in her spirits. There was, however, one function which old Smagg had entirely to himself, and with which his good lady was in nowise disposed to interfere. The observatory upstairs was entirely under

the charge of the husband; and he it was to whom the privilege of assisting the great philosopher in his experiments was alone accorded.

The fact is, that Mrs. Smaggsdale, who—as her way of curing low spirits amply testifies—was a person of practical mind, entirely disbelieved in every thing that went on in the laboratory. Could any good come of a room that was never dusted? Could any thing done in such an apartment prosper? Could any science which required to be prosecuted under such conditions be worth twopence? She had been forbidden to enter that room. Once, many years ago, impelled by a sort of frenzy of cleanliness (to attacks of which she was liable), she had entered the room and carefully dusted every thing she could lay her hands upon, and had felt a lightness of spirit afterwards of an unparalleled kind; for she said to herself that now, for once, all the house was clean and sweet. Her hilarity, however, was not of long duration. The astrologer found out what had happened, and denounced her with imprecations of so unknown and incomprehensible a sort as nearly frightened her to death. He called upon all

the most vicious of the planets to set themselves against her. He handed her over to the Great Bear to be hugged, to the Little Bear to be torn and lacerated. He brought the signs of the Zodiac to bear upon her: Scorpio and Leo were let loose upon her; the Crab was to nip her with his claws, and Taurus was to impale her on one of his horns,—in short, such a combination of horrors were to accumulate upon her devoted head, that life itself would hardly be worth the having on such terms. What was left to the wretched woman after this but to depreciate the science which was so much against her? And she did so with all her might, and even tried to make a sceptic of her husband as well.

With regard to that good man, I am afraid that it must be stated that he was of a weak disposition. He temporised. In the laboratory, and under the influence of his master, he was a profound believer; in the kitchen, and with his wife's sarcasms ringing in his ears, he doubted. Smagg was a little, seedy, mouldy old man, with a crest-fallen carriage and a shuffling gait. His appearance was wonderfully like his character, and both were evasive, in consequence no doubt of this double part

which he was always playing. To do him justice, I believe that he had not the least idea as to the state of his own mind in connection with his master's pursuits, and that he was for the time perfectly sincere, whether in his belief or in his doubt.

In pursuance of that system of having all duties in common which prevailed throughout the arrangements of this worthy couple, it happened that Mrs. Smaggsdale was not unfrequently called upon, when there was a press of business, to stand behind the counter, where she was indeed very serviceable. Here, too, her husband would occasionally officiate, and on him would devolve the duty of communicating with the head of the establishment when that remarkable character was too much engaged with the stars to be able to attend to the shop. This seldom happened, however, except in the evening; a season when the philosopher thought he had a right to devote his time to his favourite pursuit.

It is with evening time that we have now to do. The evening of the day on which Mr. Julius Lethwaite came to the conclusion—as stated in a previous chapter—that he would go and have an interview with the astrologer.

"I was just occupied with your affairs," said that jolly individual as Lethwaite entered his sanctum. "You have been a good deal in my thoughts lately."

"And I suppose you knew I was coming this evening," remarked the cynic with something of a sneer.

"You sent a premonitory current in this direction, which reached me about five minutes since," replied the philosopher in good faith. "I said to myself, 'he'll be here presently.'"

"What an impostor you are, Vampi!"

"Ah, sir, you know better than that," replied Cornelius, not in the least disconcerted. "But, as I was saying, I've been occupying myself with your affairs lately, and that made me, perhaps, particularly accessible to any influence of an atmospheric kind coming from you."

"And may I ask why I've been so fortunate as to occupy your attention lately?"

"Well, sir, to tell you the honest truth, your affairs are not looking so well as I could wish, and that's why I've been trying hard to pry into them a bit;" and the philosopher turned over a good many bits of paper with all sorts of hieroglyphics, and queer figures, and

mystic words upon them, and scratched his head with the blunt end of a pair of compasses in much perplexity. "From the time when you first confided to me the particulars from which I was able to construct your horoscope," continued the astrologer, "I've been able to put you up to more than one coming event—now haven't I?"

"Well, you've made one or two good guesses, certainly," replied the other, in a provoking manner.

"Ah, you may call them guesses; but I know better than that, and so do you." The philosopher was used to his client's sceptical way of talking, it being Lethwaite's habit always to act as if he believed in Vampi, but to talk as if he did not. The astrologer himself did not really much care; he believed *in* himself, and that was enough.

"Guesses!" he continued; "ah, you little know the certainty of science and the extent of her revelations. It is with us that the uncertainty lies and the difficulty. The truth is all there," he said, pointing to the star-lit sky, "if we poor mortals could but read it. But we gaze with dazzled eyes and read with faltering vision; and hence it is that we are

liable to mistakes. If I could venture—which I dare not—to trust my mental vision altogether, I could tell of things yet to come of which we see no hint even, in the events which are going on around us.”

“And where do you see these things?” asked the disciple; for such he appeared to be at the moment.

“There,” replied the adept, pointing again to the heavens. “The nations have their horoscopes as the individuals have of whom the nations are made up. There are signs in the sky, which those who study long and reverently can read; warnings that threaten; combinations which, indicating the fusion together of bodies which may not peacefully amalgamate, must surely end in discord. These, and the like of these, we can see, though, as I have said, with dazzled eyes; and the meaning of these we can partly make out, but with hesitating and doubtful perception only.”

There was a pause here of some duration, and Vampi occupied himself again with his cabalistic papers.

“And do you really believe in these things, Cornelius?” asked Lethwaite, whose cynicism

seemed for a time to have deserted him; “or are you only making a pastime of matters that sound too serious for play?”

“Pastime! play!” echoed Vampi; “how can you even use such words? Why, my life is given up to the study of these things. This, far more than the trade which I am obliged to follow, is the real business of my existence. And my reward is great. Detached from the things of this world, alone in this garret, with nothing but the air between me and the heavenly bodies, which it is my delight to watch, I have as little to do with the bustle and noise of this great town, am as utterly alone in it, and as little affected by it, as a solitary in the desert. And so *like* a solitary, I see strange visions here; and sometimes with the aid of this glorious invention,” and he laid his hand upon the telescope as he spoke with something of affection, “I seem to be on the point of making such discoveries as one day shall make my name immortal. Nay, my very sleep is less a sleep than a transition into another and more spiritual world, where I mingle with the shades of those whose written thoughts have been my continual study in my waking hours,—the shades of Aristotle, of Newton, and of Herschel,

of Albertus Magnus, and my namesake Cornelius Agrippa."

"And what do these tell you? what do they bid you do?" asked Lethwaite.

"They bid me go on, and by no means to be discouraged. In a society entirely occupied with facts, they bid me deal with what the world calls fancies, and study still to bring to perfection those neglected arts by which it is possible to foretell the future, to warn men of coming misfortunes, or congratulate them on the approach of a prosperity of which they can as yet know nothing."

"And it is a prediction belonging to the first of these sections which affects me just now?" asked Lethwaite.

"It is so," replied the adept. "There is some risk to be apprehended in your case. There are adverse influences at work, and which will be at work for some little time to come, by which your undertakings will run the risk of being fatally opposed. You were born under Saturn, and there are some even more powerful than he, whose machinations are just now much to be dreaded. Therefore I say—be wary."

"Then what would you advise, Cornelius?"

“I would advise you to practise the greatest caution,” replied the sage. “I would advise you for some time to come to engage in no enterprise or transaction of unusual importance, and to regard every proposal that may be made to you with the greatest suspicion; to walk, in fact, with an especial caution, and as one does who knows himself to be surrounded with pit-falls. I suppose,” he continued, after a pause, “that you have no reason yourself, and from any thing you know, to apprehend any risk?”

“Of what kind? Do you mean of a personal kind?” asked Lethwaite.

“No; as far as I have been able to make out, it is not a personal risk that you have to apprehend. There is no single indication of any thing of the sort.”

Julius Lethwaite turned over what the astrologer had said in his mind for some time. It had made more impression upon him than he could account for. He generally played with life as if it were some instrument of music, and that with so light a touch that the full sound was never got out of the deeper and more solemn chords. He was not much used to being in earnest. Trouble

and he had had but little to say to each other.

Suddenly he thought of that visit from old Goodrich. He remembered that the old man had seemed to be very much in earnest, and that he appeared to speak as if there was some special risk at hand. He had hinted that his master's partner Mr. Gamlin had been speculating in an injudicious manner, and that considering the state of things in America—the reader is reminded that we are speaking of a time when the American war was impending—that considering what thoughtful men were saying in the City, Mr. Gamlin was much too fond of dealings with the then United States of America. These were disturbing thoughts, or rather they would have proved so to any one who had harboured them. But they were unwelcome guests in the mind of Julius Lethwaite. His motto was “*sans souci* ;” and in a very few minutes after these unpleasant reflections had passed before him he had managed to become his old self again, and was ready for all sorts of unprofitable speculations about the corruptness of humanity, or indeed any thing else that did not concern his prospects.

He had got rid of every uneasy feeling, and was preparing to probe the astrologer with more questions, when he was interrupted by an undecided sort of tap at the door.

"Come in," shouted the philosopher, who recognised the sound; "come in, Smagg."

The little man obeyed; and closing the door after him as he entered, shuffled up close to his master's chair, and made the following announcement:

"Here's the lady, master."

"And does she decline to do business with you?"

"Declines to do business with any one but yourself."

"O, very well; then you may tell her that I'm coming down directly."

"Upon my word," remarked Mr. Lethwaite, as the door closed, "I think that's pretty well for a philosopher. Mysterious ladies coming here and insisting on seeing Mr. Vampi, and quite sure that nobody else will do."

The philosopher smiled. "Ah, it's all innocent enough, poor thing," he said.

They descended the stairs together, and Lethwaite passed out at the private door, Cor-

nelius impressing upon him once more as he did so the necessity of caution.

As Mr. Lethwaite passed the door of the herbalist's shop on his way home, he saw the figure of a lady standing by the counter. But she was muffled up in a shawl and closely veiled, and her back was turned towards him.

CHAPTER IX.

NOT TO BE PUT DOWN.

IT was one of Mr. Lethwaite's great objects in life to find some means of pushing his friend Gilbert, and winning for him the chance, at any rate, of distinguishing himself. Our cynic had some acquaintance amongst solicitors, and might no doubt, if he had chosen, have got for himself some experimental briefs from these gentlemen, who, like a large portion of their fellow-creatures, are ever ready to help those who are not in need of assistance. To secure their good offices for a friend who *was* in need of assistance was not so easy. And here, it may be remarked, was a case in which the discovery of a corrupt instigating motive would have been sufficiently difficult if Mr. Lethwaite had set himself the task of finding one out. Of course he would have said that he had been actuated by that love of patronising which is inherent in the human breast; but few of his friends would have been found ready to endorse such an opinion.

It was, then, with the view of giving his friend a chance, that, on a certain day about this time, our analytical friend thought that he would invite some of his legal acquaintances to dine and pass the evening, and that he would ask Gilbert Penmore to meet them. And this was something of a piece of self-denial in itself; for these same lawyers were by no means the companions whom he would naturally have chosen, unless he had some special object in view. Be that as it may, the thing was decided on; and the young gentleman who held the nearest approach to a sinecure which is to be had in these severe times—or, in other words, Mr. Lethwaite's clerk—was despatched in search first of Mr. Jeffrey of Searle Street, and then of Mr. Gregg of New Square, and then of Mr. Craft of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and finally of Mr. Phipps of Furnival's. All these gentlemen were luckily disengaged, with the exception of Mr. Gregg, who was busy preparing the defence of a gentleman who had distinguished himself by an extraordinary power of imitating the handwritings of capitalists, and affixing the same to divers cheques drawn in his own favour.

This case was making quite a sensation

in the profession, and the legal gentlemen assembled at Mr. Lethwaite's chambers were full of it.

"It's the cleverest thing you ever saw in your life," said Mr. Craft, when dinner was over. He spoke as if he were talking of a work of art. He was a little cheerful man, whom to look at, or knowing him only slightly, you would have thought so good-natured that he could be brought to do any thing; but touch him on a matter of business, and you would find that, still with the most jovial manner, he could watch his own interest as well as another. "Here's one of the cheques, look. Grasper, who's retained for the prosecution, lent it me as a curiosity."

The other two attorneys pressed eagerly forward to look. The writing was in so remarkable a hand that every one felt that it *must* be like. Of these other two legal gentlemen, by the bye, Mr. Phipps was of a smooth and somewhat evasive character, and Mr. Jeffrey was almost entirely speechless, and having an asthma, wheezed instead of talking. It was much less compromising he found.

"It's a most remarkable circumstance,"

remarked the smiling Mr. Phipps, "the proclivity of some natures towards evil. Now if this misguided individual had bestowed half the labour and thought which he has devoted to the prosecution of illegitimate studies on perfecting himself in some useful art, he might have been a valuable member of society, and would never have found himself in his present painful predicament."

Mr. Phipps always spoke in this elaborate manner, and in an unctuous voice. In his own opinion he had made a mistake in early life in not having adopted the Bar as his profession; wouldn't he have touched the juries up, he thought to himself, with eloquent phraseology and flowing periods! However, it was too late to think of that now; so there was nothing for it but to bring his phrases to bear upon the exigencies of private life.

"I suppose the counsel on both sides are retained already," remarked Gilbert—ever on the look-out.

"Ah, I believe you," chuckled the hilarious but somewhat vulgar Mr. Craft: "First-rate hands every one of 'em, I can tell you."

"I hope he'll get off," remarked Lethwaite languidly, between two puffs of cigar-smoke.

“*Hope* he will!” cried Messrs. Craft and Phipps, while the other attorney uttered a wheeze of astonishment.

“Yes, I do,” retorted the cynic. “There are always a certain number of people in a great society who can’t stand the routine of ordinary business-life, and who require adventure and excitement to keep them going. This was probably one of them. Besides, he only practised on the purses of commercial people; and you know as well as I do that they are all cheats, quite as bad as himself—”

“Come, I say,” interrupted Mr. Craft, “that won’t quite do; why, you’re in the commercial line yourself, ain’t you?”

“And I was just going to say, when you stopped me, that we cheat so at our place, that I was obliged to give up going to the office, lest my conscience should prevent me from sharing the profits of the concern.”

“You will permit me to remark, Mr. Lethwaite,” put in the elaborate Phipps, “that in the days of special pleading you would have attained to the greatest distinction, had your career led you into the intricate mazes belonging to that defunct institution.”

“By the bye,” broke in the impetuous

Craft, addressing his host, "If you've got such a strong feeling for clever rogues—"

"I have," interrupted the cynic.

"Well then, you'll be interested in a case which is beginning to make no end of a sensation in West-end circles, and which I believe is looking my way for the defence—"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lethwaite, becoming interested at once, as he thought of his friend. "Let's hear about it."

Poor Gilbert pricked up his ears also. Was there a chance?

"I'm disposed to imagine," remarked the smiling Phipps, "that I have likewise heard something of the case to which you refer. Is it not that of Godfrey de St. Aubyn, as he calls himself?"

"The same," replied Craft; "and a precious deep customer I can tell you, as you shall hear. Well, he's another of the gentlemen who 'can't stand the routine of ordinary business,' that you were speaking of just now, Mr. Lethwaite. He came over to this country with some good introductions, which are now thought to have been forged; and having very insinuating manners, and a pleasant way with him, he gets on by degrees in English society,

and in time gets to have a lot of acquaintances among all sorts of smart people, and more especially among such as he had reason to know were well represented at their bankers'. All this, no doubt, took time, and he had to live as well as he could upon a little money which he had—the result probably of some swindling transaction—and upon the credit which the tradespeople, seeing him always among rich people, were ready to give him. Besides, he had the intention of making a fortune at one stroke, and he looked forward to that.

“Well, gentlemen, being a good-looking fellow, with plenty of impudence, and the gift of the gab very strongly developed, and moreover having a fine voice for singing, he really made a great many friends, and got to be much liked; so that when he announced one fine day that he had received letters requiring his return to France immediately, every body who knew him was in despair, and his parting request that his kind friends would favour him with their photographs was promptly complied with.

“But that was not enough for this affectionate gentleman,” Mr. Craft went on: “as soon as he had got the photographs, he dis-

covered that there was still something wanting, and that he should never know a moment's happiness unless the autograph of each of the originals was written underneath his or her portrait. So he invites them all, or all he could get of them, to come on a certain day to take luncheon with him; as a sort of farewell meeting, when they could give him their autographs. Now four of his guests were men of great wealth, and this Godfrey de St. Aubyn had made it his business to find out where they banked in the course of some of the familiar conversation in which he'd been engaged with them before this time; thus he'd got his information all ready, and by the day of the luncheon had made all his preparations.

“ ‘And now, dear ladies and gentlemen,’ he said as soon as the meal was over, ‘I will speak of that which is next my heart, and I will ask you to give me those precious autographs which will make my portraits so much more precious, and on which I shall gaze with delight, when I am far, far away;’ and with that he leads the way to a table in rather a dark corner of the room, where were pen and ink all ready, and a book of photographs lying waiting for their signatures. A beautifully

neat book it was too; and under each of the likenesses there was a little piece of the pasteboard cut away, and a different kind of paper appeared underneath, ready for the name that was to be written there. St. Aubyn explained that it had been necessary to prepare the book in this way, as the pasteboard on which the photographs were stuck was absorbent like blotting-paper. He convinced them of this by making a mark at the side of the leaf, and showing them how the ink would run out of all form.

“Well, they all signed their names in the little openings left for them, and then away they went, wishing the young man good-bye, and hoping they would soon see him again, and all the rest of it. Directly their backs were turned, up jumps Mossu, and gets to work at his photograph-book.”

“Ah, I see,” cried Gilbert quickly. “He had let in slips of paper at the back; and having got the signature of each of these capitalists, exactly in its right place, he had nothing to do but to draw out the papers and turn them into cheques.”

“What an ingenious fellow, to be sure!” remarked Lethwaite.

“He sat up all night at work,” continued the attorney. “By means of the signature at the foot of each slip of paper, and with the help of certain notes and letters which he had contrived at different times to get from his friends, he was able to forge cheques to various large amounts—1000*l.*, or 500*l.*, or any sum that seemed to him a safe one—till he had made up a gross amount of not less than 5000*l.* Then as soon as the banks were open in the morning, there he was at the counter, receiving packets of notes, and shovelsful of gold, with the calmest air imaginable.”

“What an extraordinary fellow!” remarked Lethwaite again.

“Yes; but the ‘extraordinary fellow’ made a mistake at last. There was one signature which he had obtained from a very rich gentleman, with whom he had had no previous correspondence of any kind, who had a very short name, which of course I can’t mention, but I may say that there were no more letters in his signature than there would have been in that of Paul Pry; so, naturally, our friend was very much puzzled, and found it very difficult to form the theory of a handwriting with so little foundation to go upon. He succeeded, how-

ever, tolerably to his own satisfaction; more so indeed than to that of the cashier, to whom he handed it for payment. This gentleman bestowed one searching glance upon the draft, and another upon the individual who presented it. This last was conscious that his severest task had now come, and may perhaps have worn something of an evasive air.

“‘Have the kindness to take a seat for one moment,’ said the cashier very politely, and retiring with the cheque in his hand towards a door leading to one of the inner offices. As he got to the door, however, he paused for an instant, doubting whether he wouldn’t pay the draft at once and not bother the partners about it, when looking back to where he had left our gentleman, he sees him very quietly sneaking out of the office. That was enough; off goes the cashier in pursuit, calls to the policeman who was always at the door, gives St. Aubyn in charge, and there’s an end of it.”

“But what was it that aroused the suspicions of the cashier?” inquired Mr. Phipps.

“Well, he doubted about the handwriting. The look of the cheque was very different from any he had previously seen coming from the same quarter, and the sum demanded was

so large, that he thought it best not to cash upon his own responsibility."

"Suspicious beast!" muttered the cynic. "Not half so clever as the other chap."

"And you have to get up this man's defence?" inquired Penmore with considerable eagerness.

"Yes, sir," replied the attorney a little coldly; "it's coming my way."

"Now I'll tell you what, Craft," said Lethwaite, sitting up in his chair, and thoroughly in earnest, "you must give our friend Penmore here a chance as junior."

"Ah, sir," returned the other, quite a different man now from the genial storyteller of a few minutes since, "I couldn't do it."

"Well, but why couldn't you do it?"

"Why, to begin with, Mr. Lethwaite, you see the case is, between friends, not a good one; and every one engaged by me *must be* a person of tried ability and considerable experience."

"How is a man to get experience," pleaded Gilbert, taking up his own cause, "unless somebody will trust him to begin with?"

"Yes, that's very true, sir," replied the

other; "but this is not the sort of case to begin with. The slightest oversight, the least omission to push an advantage, would be fatal."

"Ticklish defence, I should say,—very ticklish," wheezed Jeffrey the silent.

"Well, I think this is an unfriendly act on your part, Craft," said Lethwaite, speaking quite in earnest.

"Now don't you be hard upon me, Mr. Lethwaite," replied the attorney. "I've got my clients to satisfy, remember, in the choice of the barristers who are to represent their interests, and they like well-known names."

"Don't press it, Lethwaite," said Gilbert rather drearily; "Mr. Craft would rather not try the experiment, evidently."

"Yes, but I *do* press it, and I think it very unfriendly."

"Well, then, look here, Mr. Lethwaite," Mr. Craft broke out desperately; "if you must know, there's another reason."

"And what's that?"

The attorney hesitated a little, and then he blurted it out all the more roughly that he was shy of what he had to say.

"Why, the fact is, sir, that your friend peaks with a foreign accent, as you must have

observed, and that would go very much against him in an English court of justice."

Few things could have been more awkward than an announcement such as this. It was awkwardly said too; and an unpleasant silence followed the attorney's speech. As for Penmore himself, he had been prepared for it; it was not the first allusion that had been made to that disaster, which was the result of his bringing-up. His friend Lethwaite felt it almost more than Gilbert did. He was a great partisan.

"I never heard such nonsense in my life," he said; "Mr. Penmore is an Englishman by birth, has an English name, and speaks the language as well as I do. The whole question is about a trifling accent, a matter of pronunciation, which will improve every day. I daresay he knows the grammar of the language better than you do, Mr. Craft, and I'm sure he knows it better than *I* do."

"Very likely," retorted Craft; "but that's not the question. The grammar ain't much, as we see every day in letters to the newspapers, and in Queen's speeches, and the like. Juries don't mind a few faults in grammar; but a foreign accent would set them against a man and against his argument directly."

“Nonsense,” retorted the partisan. “What do you say, Mr. Phipps?”

“I am afraid,” replied that polite gentleman, “that it will be indispensably necessary for me to give it against you. In England there is a most powerful conviction in the public mind that foreigners are as a race—shall I say bamboozlers? I really am unable to think of a better word at the moment—bamboozlers. And if they were to hear your friend speaking with a foreign accent, they would not pause to consider whether he might or might not be of English extraction and birth, but would say at once, ‘Now we are going to be bamboozled.’”

“The fact is,” again continued Mr. Craft, “that a court of justice is a very queer concern. Once now, for instance, give them a chance of *laughing*—”

“Of laughing?” cried Lethwaite.

“Of laughing!” echoed Gilbert, savagely.

“Yes, gentlemen, I’m obliged to say it. They might take it into their heads to laugh—and then where are you?”

Mr. Jeffrey was understood to wheeze forth the announcement that “they’d laugh if you so much as held up one of your fingers to them.”

“Now I’ll tell you what,” said Mr. Craft, as he filled himself a fresh glass of brandy-and-water, and kindled a fresh cigar. “Suppose, in order that we may form a candid opinion and a fair one, that your friend Mr. Penmore were to give us a specimen of his speaking. We’ve only heard him in the course of conversation, you know, as yet; and if he was to make a regular set speech, it might be different. Here, you’ve got a lot of law-books here, Mr. Lethwaite—not that you make much use of them, I suspect—and there are speeches of Lord Brougham’s, and Lord Campbell’s, and lots of other law swells. Suppose, now, that Mr. Penmore was to take one of these and recite it to us; or maybe he has something of the sort by heart, something he may have learnt to build his style upon: let him give us a speech of that sort, and we might perhaps form a more favourable judgment.”

“O, you can’t expect a man to do a thing of the sort in cold blood,” said Lethwaite, with rather an anxious look towards his friend notwithstanding.

Gilbert was silent. Such a proceeding as that suggested by Mr. Craft was peculiarly

repugnant to him. To attempt such a thing in cold blood, as his friend had said, was terrible. How could he do himself justice? Was it not sure to be a failure? But then he thought of Gabrielle, of the comforts she stood in need of, of the privation she had to put up with. He thought of his own ambition to excel in the law, and of all he had already sacrificed to that desire; and then he determined that he would endure yet this annoyance also, and do the thing that was required of him.

He turned over the leaves of one of his friend's books, containing various reports of trials, till he came to one containing a speech of Lord Stowel's, which it happened he knew to a great extent by heart. And in this, after pausing a little, as a bather delays before descending into the cold water, he fairly embarked; while the attorneys, prepared to criticise, were encamped over against him in formidable array.

The speech was one of those in which great eloquence and the soundest logic and the most astute reasoning were combined together. In short, it was a model of what such an address ought to be; and, truth to say, it

was really done justice to by Gilbert Penmore, in spite of his accent. A more enlightened set of judges than our three solicitors must have perceived this; but to them the peculiar pronunciation of some of the words was the only thing worthy of note; and even when the address, as it advanced, increased in strength of language and eloquence, when men of a less matter-of-fact sort would have been carried away by the earnestness and intelligence with which the speaker made his points—even then it was of the accent with which the words were uttered that the lawyers thought, far more than of the meaning which those words conveyed, and the power with which that meaning was enforced.

It may have been that Gilbert felt the critical attitude of his audience, and saw that he had to fight against a hopeless amount of prejudice. For a time he contended against this feeling; and indeed throughout he never gave in to it, but it annoyed him and made him nervous nevertheless, and that caused him to make one or two mistakes, at every one of which he could see his auditors exchange glances, manifesting at the same time a strong desire to laugh; probably only kept in check

by the imperturbable gravity of their host, who saw that his friend was beginning to get into difficulties, and did all he could to give him nerve and courage.

Gilbert went through to the end, sustained by the determination with which he had started; but he felt that he had not succeeded in winning the favourable opinion of his auditors, and when he had got to the end of the speech he said so in so many words.

“Now look you here, Mr. Penmore,” said Craft; “you take the advice of a man who’s been engaged in the practice of the law for something like twenty years, and you turn your attention to some other branch of the profession than that which you’re now aiming at. As a conveyancer, or a chamber counsel, there’s a vast deal of money to be made; your law-studies would not be thrown away, and any defects of speech, such as we’ve been talking about, would not be of so much consequence. But as to your going into court in the capacity of advocate, as you seem bent on doing, take my word for it, it won’t act; and the sooner you give up the idea, the better for you.”

“And is that your opinion, Mr. Phipps?” asked Gilbert.

"Well, sir, I am constrained to admit that it is," replied that gentleman.

"And yours, sir?" continued the young barrister, addressing Mr. Jeffrey.

Mr. Jeffrey wheezed assent.

"Well, then, gentlemen," said Gilbert, nothing daunted, "I have only to say that I'm very much obliged to you for your advice, and for the patience with which you have heard me, and for the restraint you have put upon yourselves when you have felt inclined to laugh at me; but as to my giving up the object which I have kept before me for so many years—as to my pursuing some other branch of the profession than that to which I am at present devoted, nothing shall induce me to think of so acting till I have had the opportunity, once at any rate, of pleading in open court, and bringing this question, which you have settled so quickly against me among yourselves, to the test of what may, to some extent, be called public opinion."

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Lethwaite; "well said; you shall prove them all wrong yet."

"Very good, gentlemen—very good," retorted Craft, with a grin; "all I can say is, that—we shall see."

“Yes, gentlemen,” cried Gilbert stoutly, “we *shall* see; and may the time of trial not be far off!”

But for all his brave words, the poor fellow went away that evening with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER X.

AT A CONCERT.

THE specimen which was given in the last chapter of this narrative of Gilbert Penmore's failure to make a favourable impression on the fraternity of attorneys was by no means an isolated one. He was not the man for them. They did not understand what was in him; it came out so grudgingly, as it seemed to them. There were plenty of lawyers of much less ability to whom the attorneys would take their work in preference; and Penmore would see himself passed over continually, while others of much less knowledge and discernment, but glib of utterance, were full of business.

It is half the battle in this profession of the law, as in not a few others, to have a reputation for being extraordinarily busy. The awful truth—fresh confirmations of which come before us daily—that “to him that hath shall be given,” seems to be powerfully illustrated

in a case of this kind. It is a fact that the man who has already much to do receives even more and more employment continually. Every thing in the shape of business comes his way. He is invited, nay implored, to undertake what he really has not time to do justice to; while the very excuses which he makes, the mere announcement that he has already more to do than he can attend to properly, only makes his employers more and more anxious to secure his much-coveted services.

“I understand,” says somebody who knows, “that Scruncher the dentist is obliged to retire from his operating-room six times daily in order to empty his pockets of the inconvenient weight of guineas which accumulate in them.” Away rushes any one who hears the announcement to be tortured forthwith by Scruncher. “Chalkey the artist,” says somebody else, “has commissions, I am told, which will occupy him for the next seven years at least;” and off darts the art-patron to make sure of Chalkey’s services during that eighth year which is still to let.

But our young lawyer had other things to trouble him besides professional neglect. Vexations of a more domestic sort were not want-

ing; and as if those words which we have quoted above were true of what troubles as well as of what brings us profit, accumulation of domestic perplexity came upon our friend in addition to his professional difficulties, as if these last were not enough.

It was one of the leading features of Miss Carrington's peculiar character that her moral vision was somewhat oblique in the matter of truth. Not only was she in the habit of "embroidering," or, in other words, decorating what professed to be fact with fictitious ornamentation; she went beyond this, and would sometimes even deal in fiction such as had no foundation whatever in fact,—the fruit of a powerful imagination only. Indeed, so powerful was this lady's imagination, that after any idea had been presented to her by that function two or three times, she would get to think that it really was something more than a fancy of her mind, and would speak of it as nothing less than a reality.

To what extent this lady believed that Gilbert Penmore had once been in love with her, it would be difficult to say. She certainly went on as if he had, as was shown in the matter of the photograph; nor did she let slip

any opportunity of impressing this fiction on the mind of her hostess, always taking a tone as if she conceded to Gabrielle the right to associate indeed with her husband and to live in the house, but as if *she* were the person who really understood him, and whose life should by rights have been associated with his. She was a woman, not a mere girl like Gabrielle. She would have understood his character, entered into his thoughts and his ambition, and would, in short, have been in all respects the right person for him.

Now of course it was not likely that Miss Carrington would put all this into words. Yet she managed somehow or other to insinuate it all, by dark hints, and gestures, and covert allusions. Gabrielle knew that this woman was vapouring and talking nonsense. She knew that when her husband first came over to England he had passed a few days at the house of Miss Carrington's father, who was since dead; that he had spent the time almost entirely in fishing, and that no idea of Miss Carrington, except in the light of a somewhat disagreeable young woman, had so much as entered his head. And yet, though she knew all this, and knew that the image of his dear West-

Indian had never for a moment been supplanted in his mind by that of any other woman—still the preposterous conduct of this woman in asserting a sort of tone of superiority over her, and of proprietorship in her own Gilbert, did at times annoy and irritate her.

And she had to encounter these things to a great extent alone. It was so seldom that Gilbert could be by to help her. When he was there, he always took her part and kept the enemy in order; but at other times she suffered greatly. They were two to one against her; for Miss Carrington's aide-de-camp, the faithful Cantanker, was always on the spot, and ready to back her mistress up on all occasions, and, in so far as opportunity served, to put our poor young housewife down. She would always address her—and she never did so except when absolutely obliged—as “Mrs. Penmore;” never using the generally inevitable term “ma’am,” or even “mum.” By this means she avoided any expression of allegiance, and retained that dignity which was so dear to her, at the same time that she ignored all claim on the part of the young lady to be the mistress of the house. It was well and skillfully done.

All the unpleasant messages too came through the Cantanker medium, and certainly lost nothing by being intrusted to her for delivery. "My mistress," she would say, appearing at breakfast-time, and, as her habit was, closing the door behind her before she began to speak,—“my mistress will take her breakfast upstairs, Mrs. Penmore; and she was wishful for me to say, that she would feel especially obligated if the tea could be sent up warm, as yesterday it was but stone-cold.” It was not very unusual for Miss Carrington to take her meals, and breakfast especially, in her own room; and those were days of jubilee for our young couple when she did so, as they were free from her company and that of her amiable attendant. This last was almost sure, however, to appear in the course of the meal with some message about the coldness of the tea or the toughness of the toast; or perhaps, if lunch rather than breakfast was at hand, she would meekly request that the broth “might not have its surface covered with circles of grease floating about on the top like islands.” Miss Cantanker was too well pleased when a spiteful simile came to her aid to inquire whether the image was a correct one, or she might

perhaps have hesitated at the idea of floating islands, and changed the metaphor to ships.

Miss Carrington seemed determined to lose no opportunity of showing her disapproval of poor Gabrielle, and her wish to hold an intercourse with Gilbert from which his wife should be excluded. She would send down messages to him to the effect that "she was expecting a few friends that evening, and she had no gentleman to meet Captain Scraper, and would he come up and join the party?" or, "she had got two orders for the Opera; could he make it convenient to escort her? 'It would be so nice,'" she would write on a slip of paper; or, "would he come up and play a game at picquet? she felt so very dull;" or, "she had a matter of business to consult him about; could he manage to 'slip' upstairs for half a minute?"

No doubt she had got hold of the wrong person in Gilbert Penmore. Not only had he a powerfully-developed antipathy towards the lady herself, and a very strong objection to finding himself in her society, but he felt very keenly the intentional slights which by every one of her acts was being put upon his dear Gabrielle. And this was touching him upon

a very tender point indeed. With every day that passed, it seemed as if the love between these two increased. No slight that was offered to her, no repulse that met his efforts to get on, but seemed to bind them more and more together, and to invest each with more precious qualities in the other's eyes.

Over and over again would Gilbert insist on bringing the thing to an end and giving his cousin warning, come of it what might; and it was only the entreaties, and tears even, of his wife that prevailed with him to let it go on a little longer. A little longer, she said, and then he would get to be acknowledged and would be a great man; and then they would take a new house and become quite distinguished characters. Meanwhile he must be patient and put up with Miss Carrington's provocations, and not suppose that she minded them in the least. And she would even press him sometimes—but not very much—to do what his cousin asked of him; to go and give her the benefit of his advice on business matters, or even to escort her to the play. But here even she could not prevail. Her husband was adamant. He compromised the matter by promising that he would not give her warning;

but his invariable answer to all Miss Carrington's overtures was, that he was "much too busy" to accept them.

Our lives are made up of small things ; and I cannot develop the tale which I have got to tell without dwelling on a multitude of matters which appear to be small, but which, when combined, make a large aggregate. It is my present business to show how this young couple were aggravated, past endurance almost, by the vagaries of a spiteful and tiresome woman,—and a foolish person into the bargain, which perhaps was the worst part of it all.

There was indeed, as the saying goes, no knowing where to have this vexatious lady. She was always complaining how dull she was ; but she would accept no alleviation of her dulness. If they sent her up some book or periodical in the wish to amuse her, she was sure to send it down again, with an intimation that it was trash, and that she could not read it. If a friend came in in the evening, and our young couple thinking a change might enliven her, sent to invite her to spend the evening, she would either decline to come at all, or, coming, would make herself profoundly disagreeable, retaining a forced gravity

when others were disposed for merriment, and setting herself in an especial manner against the unfortunate friend, whoever he might happen to be,—contradicting every word that dropped from his lips, generally insulting him grossly, and altogether throwing a wet-blanket over the little party.

Or perhaps something might be attempted in the way of a visit to some public place of entertainment. On one occasion Mr. Lethwaite—whom she detested—sent some tickets for a concert given by a musical society to which he belonged; and one of these was presented to Miss Carrington, the other two being retained by her host and hostess.

It was a wonderful society. Its members were as proficient as professionals, and ten times as technical. They were entirely absorbed in music. Their real professions, when they had any, were comparatively as nothing to them. They must get through their business, whatever it might be, and then to *fugue*. When any one of them met another, no matter where it might be, he took him aside, and it was a question of music directly. One of them had been to Germany, or to Paris, and had heard an old piece by Spohr, or a new

piece by Wagner. "There's a movement, my dear fellow,—goes like this, 'la, la, la, ri, ta, ta, ra,'—O, the divinest thing you ever heard in all your life; and then it goes on: 'ta, la, ra, ti, la, ri, la.'"

And so they would continue for half an hour together. In short, their souls were in it, and they went at it with a will.

But the harmony produced by the combined talent of this wondrous society made no impression upon Miss Carrington. When the first violin, coming forward to the front of the orchestra, and getting his instrument well underneath his chin, caused it to emit sounds so prodigious in volume, considering its size, or so tenderly plaintive as to move the greater part of the audience alternately to wonder and to tears, the sounds produced by this brilliant performance awakened no response in Miss Carrington's bosom. Even when it came to the strong passages, and Mr. Julien Lethwaite took his place behind two brilliantly-polished copper-drums, looking as eager as Fieschi may have done behind his infernal machine, and keeping his eye upon his conductor as fixedly as if he were going to let the said drums off at him at a given moment; and when the

moment did come, and the machines were let off, and instead of discharging volleys of grape and slugs and crooked nails, emitted a low rumbling sound like distant thunder,—even then, and when the drums, at a later period, got excited, and rattled their very loudest, till the conductor was compelled to look towards Mr. Lethwaite with a slight frown,—even at these times, let it be frankly owned, Miss Carrington was never moved to admiration, but only to say, in reference to Mr. Lethwaite and his exertions in the orchestra, that she “wondered a man could be found to make such a fool of himself.”

Now all this was not agreeable. And then she was so fidgety, that there was no possibility of keeping her quiet for ten minutes together. Mr. Penmore had arranged with considerable skill that his wife should sit between him and Miss Carrington, as he knew that if she sat next to him, she would not let him alone the whole evening. This state of things was, however, by no means agreeable to the lady; and in due time she began to agitate for a change in the relative positions of the party. “There was a gentleman sitting next her,” she said, “who would hum

the music to himself as the orchestra played it, and it was too dreadful." And then came the request: "Would Mrs. Penmore mind changing places with her, as the effect upon her nerves was such, that she must either get out of hearing of this obligato accompaniment, or leave the concert-room."

Of course poor Gabrielle had to give way; and we all know what such a change of position involves in these days of expansive costume. Then of course, having gained her point, she would begin ear-wigging the unfortunate Gilbert, much to his annoyance and to that of their neighbours, who were all fierce amateurs, eager to catch every note of the performance. Indeed, these in time began to look round and frown to such an extent, that Gilbert was obliged at last to call his cousin's attention to the fact; upon which the lady lapsed into sulkiness, and then fell asleep; and, waking shortly afterwards, declared that she was feeling very ill, and that "she was very sorry, but she must go away that moment."

The first violin was at the time in the middle of a solo impregnated with so much feeling as to be hardly audible; and it may be

imagined that the looks of the amateurs were not very amiable as our little party swept out, disturbing every body in their vicinity, knocking down opera-glasses, dragging books of the score in their wake, and spreading ruin and desolation in all directions.

“Couldn’t you have waited till there was a strong passage with the drums to cover our retreat?” asked Gilbert, with pardonable irritability, when they got outside.

Miss Carrington intimated that she should have fainted if she had stayed another moment, but said that she felt pretty well again now.

And so poor Gabrielle, who seldom got a change, was dragged away just as she was enjoying the music most. Yet there was consolation even in this, for it vexed her always to see Miss Carrington making that dead-set at her cousin Gilbert.

“We are just talking over our remembrances of a certain concert that we went to ages ago,” Miss Carrington had whispered to Gabrielle some little time after that change of seats had taken place which has been spoken of above. “Such fun we had, and such a nice drive home,” Miss Carrington added. “By moonlight, you know.”

Now all this, I am sorry to say, was pure fiction,—that sort of fiction which came so naturally to Miss Carrington, as has been hinted at in the beginning of this chapter. The fact had been, that when Gilbert Penmore visited his relation Mr. Carrington, a party had been made to attend a concert which was got up in the neighbouring town. The company had driven some miles to the town-hall where the concert was held, had been bored to death by some exceedingly dull music, and had then driven back again,—the carriage in which Miss Carrington had performed that delightful journey having contained, besides her father, the clergyman of the parish and young Penmore; the latter slumbering peacefully all the time. Such was the fact. But Miss Carrington's remembrance of it was somewhat different.

“We had an evening of the intensest enjoyment of the most delicious music,” she whispered to Gabrielle. “Italian singers down from London, all in their very best voice; a delightful moon to light us home. Your husband and I had a carriage to ourselves, and he in such spirits all the way,—very different to what he is now.”

It was thus that this estimable lady sought to entertain her friend ; and thus it is that a powerful imagination will decorate incidents in themselves dull and commonplace.

CHAPTER XI.

STILL MUSICAL.

MR. JULIUS LETHWAITE was, as we have just seen, a member of an embodied association of musical amateurs. The gentlemen of whom this association was composed were many of them most skilful performers. They made up, when all assembled, a full orchestra; and the duty of discharging not the least arduous function in that band of harmony devolved on no less a person than our cynical friend. In a word, he was the artist on the kettle-drums; and this is a much more difficult part to play than one would at first imagine. There is, for instance, a vast amount of counting to go through. The performer has to know his place, and keep to it. One touch of the drum-stick at an unexpected moment would ruin a whole overture. Beautiful and inspiring as are the notes of this charming instrument, their effectiveness is yet preëminently depend-

ent on their coming in in the right place and at the right moment. An absent-minded drummer, or one but imperfectly acquainted with the art of counting, has been known before now to rattle suddenly in an unexpected place, and by so doing to bring confusion and shame upon himself, involving at the same time his fellow-performers — engaged at the moment in developing a soft cadence with exquisite feeling—in ignominy and contempt. Nor must this important functionary ever be “backward in coming forward” when he is due. Let him be lost in thought, or absorbed in the melody made by his companions, at the moment when his services are required, and all is over; the effectiveness of the passage is lost; and when he is brought to his senses by the furious glance of the conductor withering him from the leader’s desk, it is ten to one that he instantly sets to work to make up for lost time, and ruins every thing with inopportune rattlings.

And, this—this is the instrument which we have all of us no doubt at times been disposed to conceive lightly of. This is the instrument on which, as boys, we have believed we could perform without difficulty; only

wishing indeed that we could get the chance. On this instrument men have ventured to confer a name almost characterised by levity, associating it with kettles and the like ignoble utensils.

Our good friend Mr. Lethwaite was fully sensible of the dignity attaching to the instrument to which he had devoted himself, and of the difficulties which beset the performer who would achieve the art of drumming with effect. He was continually at work early and late. The fact is that he was afraid of his leader. That gentleman was Mr. Lethwaite's inferior in every respect except in musical proficiency. There he was his superior. He was a severe gentleman too, and had had occasion more than once to reprove the kettle-drum alternately for too great haste and too great tardiness; both, as has been already shown, defects of the most radical sort. To please this leader was very difficult, and therefore it was that Mr. Lethwaite worked early and late.

Our friend was sitting on a certain morning soon after the day of that concert in the course of which the conductor had looked upon him with a frown, and was practising the kettle-drums in his luxurious rooms. The

scene was one suggestive of the greatest ease. Comfortable sofas and settees were against the walls, and fauteuils, right in their construction to half an inch of wood-work and half a grain of stuffing, were drawn round the fireplace. The walls were hung with a few good pictures, and various cedar boxes, containing *not* a few good cigars, were scattered about upon the different tables. There had been no "reasoning of our need," as King Lear expresses it. The results of careless expenditure appeared every where; and most of the objects which met the eye in all directions were such as a man could do without perfectly well. How much had been spent on that watch-making freak alone! What good materials, what admirable instruments, had been got together! In how many holes was not that watch to have been jewelled; what escapements, what compensation-balances had there not been prepared for its more perfect completion?

And the other hobby, there was money spent upon that too. Mr. Lethwaite had got a bran-new pair of drums here on which to operate. German-silver drums were these—none of your ordinary copper or brass. The leather slides by which the cords were tight-

ened were of spotless buckskin, and the parchment was white as snow and smooth as an ivory tablet. That parchment was tightened up to concert pitch, and the tone imparted by these metallic basins, across which it was strained, was really something ravishing. The drum-sticks had inlaid handles, and were a study in themselves.

Our friend was not alone, as he sat behind these two masterpieces of art, and with his music-book on a desk before him. In his desire to get every thing right for the next performance he had got a certain other member of the society (the third-fiddle, in short) to come round and practise with him, in order that he might the more readily acquire that important art of coming in in the right place and keeping out of the wrong—in which he felt himself to be still somewhat deficient. The third-fiddle was a most obliging creature, and never so happy as when he had a bow between the fingers and thumb of his skilled right-hand.

“It’s very difficult. It’s much more difficult than people would imagine,” said Mr. Lethwaite, during a slight pause in the performance.

"I think you're rather in a hurry, do you know," remarked third-fiddle. "Now, if you'll count steadily on from this place,—one, two, three, four, and then come in, I think it will be all right. Shall we try it again?"

"By all means," replied Mr. Lethwaite, letting one of his drum-sticks fall upon the resounding parchment after a fashion which would have made a "surprise symphony" of any piece of music into which the ornament had been introduced. "By all means. Now then."

"Wheen, squee, rhepe, twiddle," went the third-violin.

"One, two, three, four," and "r-r-r-rap, a-tap, a-rap, a-tap, a-rap, tap, rap, rap, rap, rap," chimed in the drum.

"Well, that's right enough," said the violin encouragingly.

"Yes, I think that was better," remarked the other, and he went on again. "One, two, three, four. Won't you play the passage?"

"O yes; I beg your pardon. Where shall we begin?"

"O, the old place: one, two, three, four—I beg your pardon, wern't you a little slow?"

"No, I think not. The passage goes like this, you know,—one, two, three, four,—

I was thinking *you* were a little fast. If you'll excuse me."

"O, by all means. Now we'll try it again."

"Wheen, squee, wheen, twiddle," quoth the violin once more, whining with the most intense feeling.

"One, two, three, four, rattle, tattle, tattle, tattle, r-r-r-rap, tap, tap, tap, tap," urged the drum, with as much feeling as could be expected.

"How did you like that?" asked the drum.

"A very little more will do it now," replied the fiddle. "But I think I would try another passage, if I were you. Here, for instance," he continued, after turning the leaves of the music-book over two or three times, "is a part where you come in at intervals, which is difficult."

"Difficult! I imagine it is difficult; you require to be as eagerly on the watch as if you were shooting pigeons out of a trap. I never thought," remarked Mr. Lethwaite, "that I should take so much trouble about any thing."

"Well, if I were you, I'd stick to that part exclusively for a time. Suppose you try it over now?"

"You're right," replied our artist on the drums; "we'll go at it at once."

“Are you ready?” asked the fiddle, bow in hand.

Mr. Lethwaite was so absorbed in readiness, with a drum-stick in each hand, and his eyes fixed upon the score, that he could not speak. But he nodded an eager assent, and the other started off.

It certainly seemed to be a very difficult passage this. It was fitful and brilliant, full of change; and the pace, as the sporting phrase goes, terrific. The drums were wanted constantly, at very short intervals; a very rapid burst, and no more. Then a flourishing bit for the fiddles, and then a bit of drum again. The effect, too, was rendered the more astounding in the present case because the third-violin naturally and rightly did not play the main air, the melody of the piece, but only his own part; which played thus as a solo was altogether mysterious and inexplicable. Mr. Lethwaite actually perspired with the severity of the mental exercise in which he was engaged. His counting was so violent that it resembled the puffing of a steam-engine, and he was absolutely out of breath with the efforts he was obliged to make to keep pace with his companion's flourishes.

“One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four—rap, tap—one, two—rap, a-tap, a-tap—one, two, three, four—rap—one, two—rap, a-tap, a-rap, a-tap, a-r-r-r-rap-tap, tap-tap, tap.—Stop. What was that?”

“I think it was a knock at the door,” replied third-fiddle.

“One, two,” Mr. Lethwaite was beginning, when the knock was repeated. “Come in!” he called, and the servant came into the room.

“Mr. Goodrich is below, sir,” said the man, “and wishes to speak with you very particular.”

“Ask Mr. Goodrich to walk up,” replied Lethwaite, beginning to count again. “We can go on just the same,” he continued, addressing his companion; “it’s only my clerk. Now then. One, two, three, four—Ah, Goodrich, how d’ye do?—All right? One, two—I’ll speak to you directly, if you’ll sit down. Now once more. One, two, three, four, rap, tap, rap-a-tap, a-tap-tap,” and off they went again.

He had not noticed how pale the old clerk looked, nor observed that the expression of his face was changed and anxious.

“If you please, sir,” said Jonathan, “I wished to speak—”

“ Ah, yes, wait a bit though—rap, tap-rap, a-tap, a-tap-tap—one, two, three, four ; rap, a-tap, a-tap—”

“ It’s very particular—”

“ Yes, yes, I know—now then, Scroop—one, two—” and off went Scroop—“ wheep, squeen, twiddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle ;” and the drums, “ rap, tap, rap, a-tap, a-rap, a-tap, a-rap-tap-tap-tap-tap—”

“ If you please, sir,” interrupted Jonathan eagerly, “ it’s most important—”

“ Yes, I know. It always is—one, two, three, four—”

“ I should take it as a great favour, sir—”

“ One, two, three, four—”

“ Sir,” said Jonathan Goodrich, coming forward and laying his hand on his employer’s arm, “ I *must* speak to you, and that at once.”

Lethwaite turned suddenly round, and saw by the expression of his clerk’s face that it really was something important which the old man had to communicate.

“ Why, Jonathan, man,” he said, “ what’s the matter ?”

“ Well, sir, I’ve come to tell you what’s the matter—but—”

“ But what ?”

“Sir, I should be very sorry to say any thing that might seem rude or unmannerly; but, but—might I ask the favour of speaking to you alone?”

“O, you needn’t mind my friend—it’s only Mr. Scroop.”

The old clerk still hesitated. “In matters of business,” he began.

The third fiddle got up and proposed to go.

“Not a bit, not a bit,” interposed the other; “we must practise all that over again before you go. Since I must be tormented about business, I’ll get it over. Come into the dining-room, Jonathan;” and suiting the action to the word, he led the way into an adjoining apartment, the old man following, and closing the door after him.

Mr. Scroop began to amuse himself with his violin. It is one of the privileges of musicians that they need never know *ennui*.

He “tried,” as the fraternity say, all sorts of favourite bits over and over again on his instrument, with his head on one side and frowning profoundly. He went from these to the study of his part in that very composition in which Mr. Lethwaite was also preparing to

distinguish himself. Then he went off again to morsels of different classical composers,—snatches of Bach, and glimpses of Mendelssohn; and finally he put down his instrument and walked slowly about the room, with his hands behind him, looking at the prints and photographs on the wall, and humming softly to himself all the time—a depressing occupation enough.

At last, when he was beginning to think that the hour had come when he might legitimately take up his hat and go, the door of the dining-room re-opened, and Mr. Lethwaite entered the room, followed by his clerk.

“My dear Scroop,” he said, quite calmly, “I am perfectly overwhelmed with shame to think that you should have been left all this time alone, and that our important occupation should have been interrupted by so trivial a matter as the arrival of my clerk with his budget full of business.—Now, Jonathan,” he continued, addressing the old man, whose anxious and depressed appearance showed in wonderful contrast to the gallant bearing of his patron,—“will you stop and hear a duet performed by Mr. Scroop and myself on two instruments seldom heard together unaccom-

panied? or are you bent on going back to that horrible place—the City?”

The old man shook his head: “I’d rather go back to-day, sir, with your permission;” and with that he made his best bow, and retired, still with the same anxious countenance with which he had arrived.

“I would give a great deal,” said Lethwaite, as soon as the door was closed, “to be able to believe in that old man as completely as I feel inclined to do. He is one of the few people who have borne the test of time—one of the few in whom I have been unable to detect any thing unworthy even after years of intimate association. I almost wish that something might occur which might enable me to test his fidelity unmistakably.”

“Perhaps something may,” said Mr. Scroop, whose retorts were ever of this brilliant sort.

“Not unlikely:—and now let’s try the difficult bit again;” and our imperturbable friend seized his drumsticks, and commenced a brilliant flourish on his instrument.

And at it they went once more with renewed energy. Mr. Scroop’s mind went at once into his violin, and wonderful results

ensued ; while Julius Lethwaite tried hard to get his mind into his drums, and rattled away with prodigious force, and sufficient regard to time to satisfy even so good a musician as his present coadjutor. They went on for full half an hour more, the one whining and twiddling, and the other rattling and thumping, till at last the third fiddle discovered that it was time for him to go, as he had promised to “try” something else with somebody else in the course of that same afternoon.

“Have you any idea,” asked Mr. Lethwaite, as the third violin was on the point of departing,—“have you any idea as to what is the salary of ‘the drum’ in a good orchestra?”

“I should think about from two to two-and-a-half guineas a week,” replied Mr. Scroop ; “but I’m not sure.”

“As much as that?” said our friend quietly.

“O, I should think at least,” answered the other. “Have you any idea of applying for the post?” he added, smiling.

“More unlikely things have happened.”

“Very well, I’ll make inquiry,” quoth the other, still smiling. And with that he got up to go, thinking what a good joke it was. The luxurious Mr. Lethwaite drumming in an or-

chestra for a living! "I can see you," he said, "coming through the little door under the stage, wiping your mouth, after having partaken of a pint of porter."

Mr. Scroop took his leave, still smiling at this conceit, and made off to keep his appointment. As he descended the stairs on his way to the street, he could hear his musical friend still drumming away with prodigious energy. The sounds were audible even in the street, and as long as the third fiddle remained within range they did not cease for so much as a single instant.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ART MYSTIC.

WE are not always most in earnest when we speak most gravely, nor is it by any means invariably the case that our meaning is a light one when we speak carelessly, and cover what we have to say with a joke. There are men whom nothing will induce to speak in a solemn tone even when they are dealing with questions which to themselves at least are of vital importance. A man of this sort will speak of some great battle in which he has been engaged as a "nasty scrimmage," and as he seizes the shell which has fallen, but not yet exploded, and hurls it over the battlements, will very likely address the terrible missile with some slang phrase, as if he were dealing with a schoolboy's firework. Mr. Julius Lethwaite was a man of this sort.

The news brought by Jonathan Goodrich, and communicated by him to his employer in the dining-room, while Mr. Scroop occupied

his leisure as best he might in the *sanctum*, was of the most startling and disquieting sort; and the old clerk was not always able to control his emotion as he told his tale. Owing to the continued indifference manifested by Mr. Lethwaite as to all matters of business, and his obstinate determination not to interfere in his own affairs, except by deputy, and through the agency of Mr. Goodrich, it had come to pass that the acting partner in "Lethwaite and Gamlin" had managed to possess himself of an undue influence in the management of the concern, and did indeed pretty much as he liked. There is no substitute to be found in this world for personal supervision. The eye of the master must be over every work that is to prosper, and the deputed authority which Jonathan Goodrich sought to exercise on behalf of his master would not do. While Lethwaite drummed at home, or consulted Mr. Cornelius Vampi in his observatory, poor old Jonathan strove hard to look after his interests in the City; but strove to little purpose. Mr. Gamlin was too much for him. He had bought his way into the firm with the conviction that he was to be the managing partner, and this he meant to be, and was.

Now this gentleman had been very much tempted by certain American investments which had come in his way, and had (as it will be remembered was hinted by old Goodrich on a former occasion) dabbled in them to an alarming extent. He had gone out of his way, too, to make large purchases of cotton, and this even to a greater extent than Goodrich himself was aware of. Then came a panic. Men began to talk gloomily about American securities, and of the impossibility of getting cotton from the Southern States if there should be a blockade of their ports. And all this time the old clerk was constantly coming to his master with entreaties that he would take some active part in the management of affairs nearly concerning him, and beseeching him to stir before it was too late. One such interview we have already described, and it will serve as a specimen of many others. Mr. Lethwaite was not a man of business, and nothing,—not even self-interest, the motive which he always spoke of as the sole instigator of all human action,—could make a man of business of him. And now the crisis so long prophesied of by poor old Goodrich had come. The tidings which came by each American mail were worse and worse ;

and at length it had come to pass that on one fine Monday morning Mr. Gamlin had not made his appearance at the office in the City, and that on inquiry made at his private house it transpired that he had not been seen or heard of since the previous Saturday afternoon. Further examination into the affairs of the firm went to prove that this gentleman had previous to his departure collected into his own hands all outstanding debts, and drawn out every penny standing at the banker's in the name of Lethwaite and Gamlin, besides turning every security on which he could lay his hands into hard money.

And this was the news which the poor old clerk had come to break—he hardly knew how—to his employer on the occasion when he had found him, as we have seen, so busy with his musical studies that he could hardly be got to attend to the old man's tale. He had got used to "Jonathan's fancies," as he used to call them, and thought at first that this was only one of the series; and it was long, even after he had succeeded in getting his master's ear, before Goodrich could make him believe what it was that had happened, and that Mr. Gamlin had shown himself so

little under the influence of self-interest, as to be guilty of the extreme folly of turning out a rogue.

When the evil news was at length brought completely home to him, one of the very first things he had said was this :

“My poor old Jonathan, what will become of you?”

We have seen how lightly this blow fell upon Julius Lethwaite. Perhaps he did not perfectly realise it. Perhaps his very incapacity for business did him service here. He had vague ideas that it would “all come right.” He had heard of so many instances of people being “under a cloud,” as it was called, for a time, and then emerging again not so much the worse for that temporary overshadowing. He had known men obliged to give up their establishments and live very quietly for a time, and till they could tide over certain business embarrassments, who had still kept on, and managed to emerge at last right side uppermost. But the old clerk shook his head. They would keep things quiet, and go on as long as they could. The head clerk was a very superior man, and those two would work and do all they could; but still he had little

hope. It did not matter for him so much ; if things came to the worst, he had saved a little money, and he could most likely get other employment. But with Mr. Julius it was different. He had been used to luxury—had never known what it was to do without any thing that he wanted. What was he to do ?

And when our cynical friend was alone he did for a moment think of these things ; but, as has been said, hardly understanding them. He had a vague idea that he ought to do something. He looked round his room, and thought that he must certainly at any rate reduce his expenditure. He saw all the luxurious things that surrounded him, and summed up what they were worth,—the pictures, the plate, the china, and nick-nacks. He called to mind the enormous rent that he was paying, and determined that that must be reduced at once, and that he must make a move to less fashionable quarters. He even sat down at once and wrote a letter giving warning to his landlord ; and he felt as if he was quite doing business, and perhaps even was not without some sense of enjoyment.

Then he got up and took a spell at the drums again ; and finding that he got on better,

began to reflect upon what his friend Seroop had told him of the earnings to be made out of that instrument. Finally, he reflected that since the predictions of Mr. Vampi had been in this particular case so wonderfully verified, he could not do better than go and tell him about it.

Cornelius Vampi sat in his observatory deeply engaged in study. It was evening, and he had had a busy day of it. To judge by appearances, his labours had been of a mixed character, partly medical and partly astrological. For besides the papers which lay before him, and with which he was now engaged; besides the books and the globe, all evidently recently in use, there was a small fire alight in the chemist's stove, and various vessels used in the concoction of medicine stood about, some full, some empty, some heated, some allowed to get cold; while in a great earthen jar close at hand were quantities of herbs still damp and smoking, from which all the virtue had been extracted, and which were waiting Mr. Smaggsdale's leisure to be thrown away. Other members of the same family were placed in convenient positions ready for use.

Mr. Smaggsdale was certainly not at leisure just now. Surrounded by pots and pans and earthenware pipkins, he was engaged under his master's direction in watching the different preparations as they simmered and bubbled through different stages, ready when the "moment of projection" arrived to proclaim the fact, in order that the adept himself might take advantage of the important crisis when his drugs should be in the fittest state for combination with each other. So "old Smagg" had to keep constantly on the look-out, prying and peering into the different vessels one after another; now lifting a cover with caution, now tilting a lid so as to modify the heat of the liquid which it covered, removing this compound into a cooler place, and that to a warmer; adding a little distilled water here, and a pinch of herbs there, and stirring with a wooden spoon every where.

His master had evidently deputed all this inferior kind of labour to "old Smagg," with perfect confidence in his will and ability to discharge it. The philosopher himself kept to his papers, occupied with such mental exercise as he could trust nobody but himself to engage in. He had had a busy day of it, as has been

said; and besides his ordinary work in the shop, had had visits respectively from an old lady who believed, as did Vampi himself, in an elixir of youth—at which, indeed, Mr. Smaggsdale was then at work—and also from a young lady who had brought back her horoscope in disgust, and not liking her destiny, had requested *to have it altered*. The astrologer had replied with some show of reason, that he did not profess to construct destinies to order, but only to transmit to those who sought his services the revelations which he was able to read in the heavenly bodies. On hearing this, the young lady had cast, as it were, her destiny from her, and falling back upon incredulity, had torn her written fate to pieces before the astrologer's eyes, saying that the young man bestowed upon her by the document was not “her sort,” and finally expressing her belief that our philosopher was little better than an impostor.

The infamous accusation seemed to glance off our great man without harming him. Nay, he could even afford to treat the calumny with ridicule: “An impostor, Smagg!” he said, smiling benignantly as he addressed himself to his colleague; “that’s what the wench

called me. We must take care to remember that, Smagg."

Mr. Smaggsdale had newly come from an interview with his wife, in the course of which the good lady hearing from her husband of the epithet bestowed on the astrologer by this irreverent young woman had endorsed it with the greatest energy. Fresh from his wife's tirade, old Smagg, who, as we know, had no opinions of his own, was for the time in somewhat a sceptical mood, and he had not been long enough among the retorts and crucibles for the influence of the observatory to react upon his credulity. So he confined himself to his own immediate occupation, and holding the lid of one of the pipkins in his hand, and peering into the vessel to which it belonged he said, "It's on the bile, master."

"I am sorry for that poor girl, Smagg. I could have told her much that it would have been well for her to know."

"It will bile in another minute," resumed Smagg.

"Remove it to a little distance and let it simmer for half an hour," replied his master. "Do you know, Smagg," he continued after a while, leaning back in his chair and seeming

to expand in a sense of his own exaltation, "I feel at times as if I should shortly be able to see into futurity merely by an act of the will, and without having recourse to the stars at all?"

Mr. Smaggsdale, in his transitional state of belief, did not seem to know what to say to this; so he merely replied, "Ah, that *would* be nice!"

"The very future of the human race seems sometimes to be spread out before me, Smagg," continued the philosopher, without noticing this prosaic remark. "With the advance of time and the progress of education, I believe that it will get gradually better and better and wiser and wiser, and at the same time more and more practical. I should not wonder if a time were to come, for instance, when people ceased to say 'good morning' at meeting, or 'good night' at separating for the evening; saying to themselves, 'So-and-so will not have a better morning or a better night for my saying these words, nor will he fare the worse for my leaving them unsaid.' On the same principle the lawyer may abandon one day his wig, the lord mayor his mace, and the common councilman his gown. Then as

to war, Smagg, do you mean to tell me that that madness can go on much longer? Why, such engines of offence and defence will be invented by modern ingenuity as will shortly render it impossible. We have got rid of the duello, Smagg, which is a battle between man and man; and war, which is only a duello between nations instead of individuals, must follow. Public opinion settles which man is right in the case of a private quarrel, and public opinion will settle which side is right in a quarrel between nations. It gets more influence every day; and as to the man who will not listen to it, why, society will have nothing to say to him, and that is a punishment which he can't bear. O, there are wonderful times coming, Smagg. I don't say that you or I will live to see them, — their full development we certainly shall *not* live to see, unless one of us is the Wandering Jew."

"And that's not me, sir," interposed Smagg, beginning, under the influence of all this prophesying, to yield his belief.

"Very well, then, you can only hope to see the beginning of the great times, Smagg; but the beginning you may see, and then

you'll find that my words are confirmed, and then you'll believe."

"O, sir, don't imagine for a moment that I *don't* believe."

"You vacillate, old Smagg; you know you vacillate at times."

"Ah, sir," replied the old man, in the tone of one who deprecates well-merited wrath, "it's only for a moment now and then. Do you never doubt yourself, when the things don't happen as you've foretold them?"

"*I* doubt!" cried the master. "Doubt the influence of the stars! Doubt the sublime theories that great minds have, after years of study, so painfully and laboriously eliminated from a continuous contemplation of the movements and combinations of the heavenly bodies! Why, Smagg, what are you talking about? and what do you mean, pray, by talking about 'things not happening as I've foretold them'? When was that, Smagg? when was that?"

"O, sir, I didn't mean any offence."

"Offence!—no, I know you didn't. But what did you mean?"

"Well, sir, for instance, just now there was the young woman who wouldn't have her

horoscope at any price. She said it was all wrong."

The wrath of Cornelius rose at this to a pitch almost of sublimity.

"You miserable, hesitating funkard!" he burst out, coining a word in the fury of the moment. "What! influenced by the opinion of that insensate lump of idiocy which—I do not say *who*, but *which*—has just left us! What! you would set the reckless assertion of that profane wretch against the dicta (the deliberate opinions) of one who has devoted his life to study and research! But you had better go on a step further, in endorsing the opinions of that enlightened personage, and call me as she did an impostor."

"O, sir, don't. You make me shudder."

"Shudder on, you child of Saturn! and may the evil influences of that dark and sinister planet, under which you were, as the poet has it, 'littered,' descend upon you unmitigated by the protecting interposition of any less malignant celestial influences! For shame, Smagg, for shame! To think that I should have lived to see the day when the very flesh and blood that I have nourished turns against

me and joins with a sordid scullion to brand me with the title of impostor !”

Poor old Smagg was firm in his belief again now. The matrimonial influence was weak ; that of the philosopher was in the ascendant, and he was full of remorse.

“ O, Mr. Vampi, sir,” he cried, “ forgive me ! It was only a slip of the tongue, and it was but for a moment. I know it was foolish, and ungrateful too, to be in doubt even *for* a moment. I know that you’re right, sir, and that if things don’t come as you say, it’s the things’ fault, and not yours. I know that you can read the stars and make out what they’re up to with a mere look of the telescope here. I know that you can do what you like with them, and that when Venus is breaking into the bloody house of Mars, or Jupiter is up to some dreadfulness in his second chamber, that you can come forward and get Orion to tackle them with his belt, or Saturn to enclose them with his ring, or some other lady or gentleman to interfere and make things all square again. O yes, sir, I’m aware of all this, and how you forewarned me when Pisces was dead against me, and how the fish-bone stuck in my throat that very day, and I was near to choking.

I've seen the very stars wink as you've looked at them, sir, and the ivinly bodies come out from behind a cloud when you've been in wants of them. And I've seen you overcome by evil influences too; and I remember the day when Mercury was one too many for you, and you said you was sure he'd play you a trick, and sure enough that very evening the telescope fell down with a crash and broke every bit of glass in its body. O yes, sir, I've known all these wonderful things and have had experience of 'em, and yet at times the unbelieving fit will come upon me strong and make a beast of me, in spite of all the advantages that I have had. But, sir, it ain't my fault, I do assure you; and if ever such a thing should happen again—which, if possible, it sha'n't—I do entreat and hope with all my heart that you'll believe that Saturn—under whom I was a-littered—is at fault, and that it is all his doings, sir, and none of mine."

This extraordinary profession of faith and jargon of second-hand astrology seemed to appease our philosopher to some extent, and master and man were both settling down again to their respective occupations, when a knock

came at the door, and Mr. Julius Lethwaite entered the sanctum.

"Ah, Mr. Lethwaite! glad to see you, sir," said the astrologer. "I've been looking into your affairs up there," and he pointed to the skylight, "and I don't like the look of them still—but how are you, sir? you don't look quite the thing."

"O yes, I'm right enough; a little weighed down, as usual, by a sense of the corruptness of human motive, but I'm used to that. And so you still don't like the look of my prospects?"

"No, sir, I don't," replied the sage. "It's no use my saying I do if I don't, is it?"

"Not a bit," said the other carelessly; "and so you can't hold out any better prospect for the future?" he continued.

"Not for the present, sir," was the reply. "But we must hold on, sir, and be hopeful; you've got some good friends up there," and he again pointed towards the skylight, "as well as some fierce enemies, and so I say we must hope."

Mr. Lethwaite was silent for a time, and sat staring in an absent manner at the adept, as if he had really hardly noticed before what a remarkable individual this was with whom

he had come in contact. It was a warm night rather, and the little room was made especially hot by the stove at which old Smagg was cooking his herbs. Cornelius had taken off his coat—his flesh alone kept him warm enough, he said,—and was puffing and blowing over his studies, red-hot with the exertion, and with his jolly face suffused with perspiration. Every now and then he threw his huge form back in his chair with a gasp, making the fabric creak again as if it must give way. At such times too he would take the opportunity of mopping his brow with his handkerchief, and would emerge from behind it looking happier and smiling more radiantly than ever.

“And this is the man,” thought our cynic to himself, “who consumes the midnight oil in study. This is the ‘pale student’ who wears himself out in profound speculations concerning the unseen world, who would fain pry into futurity and extort their secrets from those mysterious planets which whirl above our heads. It is inconceivable.”

Lethwaite sat staring at the adept in speechless astonishment for some time, and then, when next the philosopher leant back in his chair to take breath, said abruptly:

“You make some good guesses, Vampi, sometimes.”

“Ah, Mr. Lethwaite, the old phrase again—guesses.”

“Yes; and curiously enough they’ve turned out right in my case. I’ve come to grief.”

“What do you mean?” asked the philosopher, laying down his papers and pushing his spectacles up upon his forehead.

“I mean what I say,” repeated Lethwaite; and with that he proceeded to lay before the astrologer some of the circumstances relating to the present embarrassment of his affairs and the future difficulties in which he was likely to be involved, with which the reader is already acquainted.

It was impossible to ignore the fact that, as this recital went on, an expression of something very like triumph became developed on the countenance of our corpulent astrologer. Now and then he would even direct a glance towards old Smagg, who was still at work at the stove, which glance said as plainly as eyes can speak: “I hope you hear this, and observe its bearing on what we were talking of just now.” No doubt—for our philosopher was a good fellow at heart—no doubt he was

sorry for the misfortunes which threatened his friend; but still what a thing to have his predictions come true! what a thing to have them borne out by facts!

Mr. Lethwaite did not fail to observe the condition of self-complacency into which the great man had fallen. Here was a case of motive for him. "He is actually glad of my misfortunes," he said to himself, "because through these his prophecies are verified."

"Well, sir," began Cornelius when he had heard all, "I'm extremely sorry for what has occurred,—grieved I may say; but still you must remember that we've no reason to despair, having some good friends among the planets to espouse our interest. But, sir, you'll allow me in the mean time to make one observation,—I do hope after this that you'll not talk about 'guesses.'"

Lethwaite had opened his mouth to reply, when there came a low tap at the door, which was then opened a very little way, and a voice was heard to pronounce in a hoarse whisper the dissyllable:

"Smaggsdale."

The gentleman thus appealed to got up from his place, and shuffling across the room,

went out for a moment; and after holding a whispered conference with some one outside, reappeared, and closing the door behind him, uttered these words:

“It’s my wife, sir.”

“Well, and what does she want?” asked the philosopher.

“It’s the lady, sir.”

“What lady?” asked Cornelius again; he had hardly collected his faculties.

“The strange lady, sir. Mrs. Smaggsdale wants to know if she shall send her away?”

“Not by any means—not by any means,” answered the astrologer, getting up and putting on his coat; “I’ll come down directly.”

Mr. Vampi stretched and wriggled himself into his coat with considerable effort, having previously, out of a feeling of intense deference to the sex, a member of which he was about to confront, arranged his scant hair with a pocket-comb before a scrap of looking-glass which stood in a corner of the room. Mr. Lethwaite could not repress a smile as he witnessed this small ceremonial act; but it must be owned that if the smile was meant to be a cynical one, it was a distinct failure.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRANGE LADY.

CORNELIUS VAMPI was no ordinary fortune-teller. The vulgar arts of reading the future prospects of his clients by means of palmistry, or by the combinations to be made with a pack of cards, were altogether beneath him. Indeed, his feeling with regard to all such practices was something more than negative. He looked upon them as sacrilegious, as bringing discredit on a great cause. "What!" he would say, "read a man's future by consulting the marks upon his hand,—lines which can be affected by the habits of his body, by the use he makes of his limbs as he grows to maturity! The peasant boy who handles the plough will by its use acquire one set of lines, while the student who is for ever writing or turning over the leaves of his beloved volumes will have another. But these cannot show the future of his life; while as to divination by

the cards, it is even more vile and more vulgar still. An invention of man; a set of signs put together to please a foolish king of France; a thing that once was not—why, it is preposterous! But the stars,” quoth Cornelius, gazing at them through the open window of his garret,—“ah, with them it is widely different. Man has had no hand in their construction; nor can he by his strength or his wisdom affect their movements by the fraction of a degree. They can affect him, but he cannot influence them.”

Strange to see that great ponderous creature, with his bulky frame, his florid countenance, and his mighty capacity for enjoyment, leaning against the frame-work of his open window, rapt in contemplation of those wondrous bodies which live in that eternity of space to whose extremity our gaze tries vainly to penetrate. That window was to him so much. It seemed to give him access to another world. Yes, this house, whose foundations were laid in the dirt, rose, as it seemed to this strange man, to the very gates of heaven. Not more superior in his eyes was a man's head, in which such glorious thoughts and noble aspirations dwell, to his feet, that are for ever in

contact with the mire, than was the upper region of that poor dwelling-place of his to that lower part which came in contact with the very mud and sewage of the town.

Who can tell what that window was to Cornelius Vampi? It was a link between him and the heavens, between the terrestrial and the celestial worlds. The town in which our enthusiast lived—the squalid neighbourhood which surrounded him—could not spoil his prospect from that window, nor take away from the splendour of that scenery which he loved so well to look upon. That celestial scenery was every thing to this man; and not the Chaldean peasant, who gazes on the heavenly bodies as he lies out upon his native plains, had more free access to the gods of his idolatry than had Cornelius Vampi in his London garret.

What do we, who are entirely reasonable know of such happiness as was enjoyed by this enthusiast? He had a great faith. He knew no anxieties. His life was pure. It never crossed his mind to fear lest he should have less to live upon than his daily wants necessitated. His business was a good one, and brought him all that he required. His

astrological studies were outside and beyond it altogether, for it must never be supposed that these were profitable to our philosopher. Not one penny did Vampi gain by his vaticinations. Not from his richest clients: not from Lethwaite himself in his most prosperous days had Vampi ever taken money. These things were too sacred in his eyes to be made subservient to lucre. When he predicted the events which the future had in store for a rich man, or cast the horoscope of a servant-maid, he was engaging in a solemn act, to associate which with gain would have been nothing less than a crime. He would have expected the power which he believed dwelt in him to have deserted him if he had thought of such a thing. To believers, to those who consulted him gravely and in earnest, what he had to give was given freely and for nothing.

And let no one suppose that Vampi was an impostor. An impostor is one who, with an eye to profit, or at any rate to his own advancement in some way or other, professes a thing in which he does not really believe. Now Vampi believed. He was in many respects a child, and he was a child in his belief in those occult arts to which he was devoted.

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He had this great and rare quality of belief to a most wonderful and comforting extent; and this it was that made him so completely the oracle of the poor people in his neighbourhood. He believed in the advice which he himself gave. He believed in his own drugs, in his herbs and his corn-plasters. And so in like manner he had confidence in the horoscopes which he cast, and in those strange house-breaking propensities which, in the parlance adopted by the astrological fraternity, are so freely attributed to the different planets.

That visit of Julius Lethwaite's to the philosopher which was described in the last chapter left Cornelius in a high state of triumph. It was not often that such rapid success followed his labours. It was not often that his predictions were fulfilled in such a remarkable manner as they had been in the case of our cynical friend. It was too often the case that counter-influences would get to work and make his prophecies break down in the most grievous fashion. But here was a case in which he had predicted a great danger, nay had almost specified it, and had bidden him over whom that danger hung to exercise an especial care and caution, if possible to avert it. And upon this

man whom he had thus forewarned suddenly, and almost immediately after the prediction had been uttered, behold, there had fallen heavy losses, and great trouble had come upon him. "It is prodigious," said Cornelius, "and except for the poor gentleman's own sake eminently satisfactory." For though our philosopher was an entire believer in his predictions, as has been said, he believed in them and in his art perhaps even more fully when those predictions came true than when they did not. For Vampi was human.

"I wonder why I could not tell him the precise nature of what he had to fear, but only that there *was* something. Ah, I shall be able to read more clearly soon, to see more and more distinctly."

It was immediately after Lethwaite had left him that our philosopher fell into this course of reflection. It will be remembered that he had been summoned to attend the "strange lady" in the shop below, but had forgotten all about it in the triumph of the moment. He now remembered that the lady was waiting, and was just leaving the sanctum to attend her when he encountered the faithful Mr. Smaggsdale on the stairs. He had come

up to remind his patron that the lady was getting impatient.

“She said she was to see you particular to-night, and that you know it,” said Mr. Smaggsdale.

“Yes, it’s all right ; I’m going down now.”

“The other party about the elixir of youth was here to-day. She says she’s taken one bottle and that it has not done much for her, for that she met an old acquaintance of forty years’ standing in the street and he said, ‘Ah, ma’am, you and I both begin to show our years,’ and she ain’t best pleased.”

“Ah ! she must have patience, Smagg ; she must have patience,” said the philosopher, as he descended the stairs.

The strange lady was waiting for him in the shop. She had taken up her accustomed position in the darkest corner that was to be found, and the farthest away from the door. She had even got the stuffed alligator between her and the light and his shadow fell upon her. She was dressed as usual, her veil was closely folded over her face, and her figure was greatly concealed by the folds of her dark woollen shawl. She was standing impatiently tapping the counter as people do when

they are kept waiting; and when Cornelius at length appeared she seemed to reproach him for having been so long in coming to her. Then the usual transaction took place between them; she handing to him something wrapped in paper, and he retiring to the back-shop and reappearing with a similar package, which he handed to her with a bow, and addressing to her some words spoken in an undertone.

“And now, madam,” he added aloud, “if you’ll follow me, I’ll show you the way to my observatory, where we can talk of matters of a more spiritual sort;” and so saying he led the way to where there was a division in the counter, and lifting a portion of it which moved upon hinges he made way for the lady to pass behind. Then he opened the door at the back which gave access to the staircase, and they both ascended together.

The lady had to pause more than once on the way up, and when she at length reached the sanctum was very much out of breath.

“You are in weak health,” said the philosopher, speaking gently to her. “Those stairs ought not to have distressed you so much,—look at me;” and he stood before her as calm and unmoved as if he had just risen from an

easy-chair, and his breath came as quietly as that of a sleeping child.

“Ah, you are used to it,” said the lady; and she began to look about the strange place, and to examine it with an appearance of curiosity.

“What a curious room!” she said, as she warmed her hands at the stove. “It is like the laboratory of some alchemist. Do you seek for the philosopher’s stone?”

“No, madam, I do no such mad thing as that,” replied our herbalist. It was a curious thing in his character that he would have nothing to say to alchemy, and indeed treated its pretensions with contempt.

He had seated himself by this time in his accustomed place, and got out his papers and instruments, and with these he busied himself for a while, muttering all sorts of incoherent words from time to time, and writing down a great many unintelligible and cabalistic signs upon paper. He referred, too, to different calendars, and other documents already written out on parchment, and to some papers covered with strange signs and drawings, figures of animals, birds, and fishes, extraordinary combinations of circles one within another, mathe-

matical figures, and numbers without end. Over these he pored for a long time, appearing to be exceedingly puzzled and perplexed by his studies. At last he pushed up his spectacles upon his forehead, and heaving a deep sigh, which was a very unusual proceeding with him, leant back in his chair and fixed his eyes upon his companion.

"I have never had such difficulty with any thing," he said, after a while, "as with the attempt to read your future. Ever since you gave me the first necessary particulars I have been trying to arrive at some certain conclusions, and have been unable to do so. Are you sure that the year, day, and hour of your birth were given me accurately? The slightest mistake would throw every thing out."

"They were accurate," answered the lady; "I can answer for them."

"It is so strange," continued Cornelius. "I can go a certain distance. I have told you, as you admit, particulars connected with your girlhood and subsequent life up to this time—particulars which I could only know by means of my art."

"They were all correct," said the lady; "though I thought somewhat vague."

“Vague !” repeated the astrologer ; “ what would you have ? ‘ *De minimis non curat lex*,’ and in like manner you would not have the sublime science of astrology become a thing of trivial detail. It condescends not to small matters. It gives forth its hints in mystic language, a language intelligible only to the adept.”

“ And, as I understand you,” replied the lady, “ even the adept is now puzzled, and my destiny is revealed in characters which even the initiated cannot decipher ? How is that ? ”

“ There were stormy influences at work, madam, at the time of your birth,” said the philosopher, evading for a time the lady’s question ; “ and, as I have had the honour of submitting to you, those influences were sure to have power over your whole life.”

“ And how about its termination ? ” asked the strange lady abruptly, and with a certain tremor in her voice.

“ Of that at present I know nothing.”

“ ‘ At present,’ and when are you likely to know more ? ”

“ Whenever I am able to see more clearly than I can do at present.”

“ And when is that likely to be ? ”

“That, madam, I cannot say,” answered the astrologer.

These words were followed by a silence of some duration. The astrologer seemed to be occupied in pondering over something that he wished to say. He referred again to his papers, and then he held his head in his hands and with closed eyes and a puckered brow seemed to be engaged in straining that spiritual sight which, when we seek to use, we mechanically suspend the action of our bodily eyes, as if the mental sight and the corporeal could not be exercised simultaneously.

“It seems,” said the astrologer, speaking slowly in a low key, and without altering his position or opening his eyes—“It seems as if I had embarked on a journey, had pursued it a certain distance—a considerable distance even—as if the road, winding through obscure valleys sometimes, and sometimes over rugged by-paths and ill-defined ways, had reached at last a place where it was no longer marked at all, and beyond which I seek in vain to pursue it. I have come to the edge of some steep declivity down which I look in vain for the track which I have lost, and all beyond is darkness. I have had no such experience be-

fore. I have seen things vaguely before ; I have seen shapes and forms of which I could make no certain thing, and then beyond I have again seen clearly. But now I can see nothing at all. I use all the skill I know, and endeavour with all the resources I have at command, to throw some light forward into this dark abyss. A barrier seems to erect itself, even now as I gaze, between me and the future. The stars throw no light here—not even an uncertain one—and all is darkness !”

Again there was silence. The astrologer’s eyes were closed no longer now, and he seemed as one who had woke up from some trance.

“You own yourself defeated ?” asked the strange lady.

“For the time I do,” answered Cornelius. “It may be that I am not just now in good health. It may be that my eyes are wearied with straining into the darkness, and that hereafter my mental vision may become clearer. At present I can see nothing.”

“Then there is nothing that need detain me longer ?” asked the lady.

“Nothing—except that I have a favour to ask of you,” answered Cornelius. “I feel—it may be a fancy—but I feel as if I could

engage in this work with more confidence if—
if—”

“If what?”

“If you would let me look upon your face.”

The lady answered not a word, but raised her veil, and putting it back stood before the astrologer motionless as a statue.

Cornelius looked long and earnestly at her. “Thank you,” he said very gently; “that is enough.” And he took the lamp to light her down the stairs. “If you could come again very shortly,” he said, “I might know more. To-morrow perhaps, or the day after.”

“It shall be the day after,” said the strange lady.

“The day after to-morrow, then,” said Vampi.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISCHIEF BREWING.

“CONGRATULATE me, Gilbert,” said Mr. Lethwaite, as he sat himself down one evening in the room where our young friends the Penmores were at work; the husband turning out a copy of verses for a certain periodical, and the wife engaged in knitting the heel of a stocking, which is as critical a proceeding as any other that can be mentioned. She had intimated by a shake of the head to Mr. Lethwaite when he came in, that he must not speak to her, or expect her to shake hands. Then she went on counting with all her might.

“Ah, I see it’s as bad as playing on the drums,” said Lethwaite; and the wife being then absorbed, he went and sat himself down by the husband and began to talk to him, as we have seen. But Gilbert lifted his hand in deprecation. His eye was in a fine frenzy rolling—he was in agonies over a difficult line.

"Hang it!" muttered Mr. Lethwaite to himself, "I seem to have chosen the wrong moment."

Penmore entreated him once more by a gesture to forbear, and presently finishing the last line with a flourish of the pen, and then repeating the words of his friend, which he had heard but vaguely, asked:

"Congratulate you, on what? on having every thing that this world can give?"

"On having nothing," replied the other imperturbably.

Mrs. Penmore just looked up from her work, concluded that he was joking, naturally enough, and went on knitting.

"Yes," replied Gilbert, "we all know that that's the case."

"I assure you that it's the case," continued Lethwaite in the same tone. "My partner has bolted with every thing he could lay his hands on, leaving us nothing but our embarrassments."

"What do you mean?" asked Penmore.

The astonishment of the husband and wife as Lethwaite unfolded his tale was altogether unbounded, as indeed was their sympathy. People must have seen something of poverty

themselves to be able to feel for the pecuniary troubles of others. Lethwaite himself seemed to be the least moved of the party. "One of the advantages of having no feeling," he said, "is that I really don't seem to care about this business."

"Not care about it?" repeated husband and wife in a breath.

"Upon my honour, I don't at present," replied this remarkable personage. "I don't know what I may do hereafter; but I don't at present."

"Well, but what do you mean to do?" asked Penmore.

"Do? O, I shall drum."

"Drum!"

"Yes; my musical friends tell me that there's a very respectable income to be made out of dextrous drumming."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Gilbert, somewhat bewildered.

"O yes," continued Lethwaite, "consider what a power of destruction lies in the hands of the drummer; how easily he may destroy every thing. It is worth any money to secure a man who, with tight parchment before him and drumsticks in his hands, is

capable of self-control, and can keep himself within bounds."

"I can conceive that," said little Mrs. Penmore.

"But do you mean to say," asked her husband, "that you actually contemplate turning your drumming powers to account?"

"I do most distinctly. O, I assure you I'm under no uneasiness whatever. Then there's the watch-making."

"You're rather slow at that, aren't you?" said Gilbert.

"Well, I am a little. Then there are one's relations. Mine are an infernal set; but then they're proud."

"Is that a quality which is likely to help you just now?" asked Penmore.

"Most undoubtedly. They'll hear of my losses; then they'll say, 'Suppose he should destroy himself, what a disgrace to the family!' and then they'll come down. Here's one of the advantages, you see, of an insight into motive; I can tell at once what they'll say and what they'll do. But I'd rather do without them, if possible."

"You take a cheerful view of things, I must say, Lethwaite."

"One of the advantages of having no feeling. By the bye there's one thing I don't take a very cheerful view of. I'm very uneasy about the look-out of my poor old clerk. I can't think what will become of him."

"What, old Goodrich?" said Penmore. "I don't think you need trouble yourself about him. I've heard some mercantile friends of mine speak of him as quite a well-known character in the City, and one who might have bettered himself years ago, if he had chosen."

"You don't mean to say that?" asked the cynical man, brightening up considerably. "He never even hinted that to me. Why, he must have been staying on against his own interest in order to look after my affairs. But no, that's impossible—"

"The dear good old man!" said Gabrielle.

"No, no, it's impossible, I tell you," cried the sceptic. "Now what can his motive have been?"

"Why, attachment to your service, of course," answered Mrs. Penmore.

"Impossible!" replied the other; "the world is not constituted like that."

"Some part of the world is not, I dare-

say," replied the lady; "but I'm sure that good old man is."

"I wish to heaven I could think so," said Lethwaite; "but I daren't. The finding out that one has been duped, after giving any one credit for a long course of disinterested conduct, is so very dreadful."

"I had rather be duped over and over again," said Gilbert, "than never be able to allow myself the luxury of belief."

"Gilbert," said his wife reproachfully, "I thought you had given him up. You know that he hates us, and all his fellow-creatures, and himself too, and glories in it."

Lethwaite laughed. "Not so bad as that," he said; "and it's no new doctrine. Some ancient writer has said that he challenges the world to produce from the time of the creation down to that moment when he spoke, one single action, the exciting cause of which should be altogether pure. Now, what do you think of that statement? I think it is one of the Fathers who says it."

"The Fathers may say what they like," said Gilbert; "my firm conviction is that it won't do to pry into motives and exciting causes. To peer into the defects of what is

on the whole a fine character is much such an act of madness as if I should take you and clap you in the sun-light, and then examine your countenance with a microscope. What specks and blotches, and defects of every sort and kind, I should discover !”

“Come, I say,” interposed the subject of this imaginary examination.

“O yes, but I should find such flaws,” continued Penmore, “in the finest skin that ever covered a human anatomy ; while as to going below the skin—do consider what ugly things we should come to then. Yet this is what you want to do. You want to take the skin off one’s mind and dissect that ; and I tell you again and again that it won’t do.”

There is no telling how much longer Gilbert might have gone on trying to drive his friend out of his intrenchments, had not the domestic attached to the service of Miss Carington—Jane Cantanker by name—made known her presence in the room by a protesting and injured cough. She had knocked and entered unobserved.

“If you please, Mrs. Pingmore,” she said, taking advantage of a pause in Gilbert’s flow of eloquence, “my mistress would be glad if

you would take the trouble to step upstairs for half a moment, as she have something which she wishes to say very particular."

And with that and a prolonged stare at Mr. Lethwaite, whom she looked upon as a worthless and dissolute character, and hated accordingly, the beautiful maiden left the apartment.

It is impossible to describe the chilling effect of this interruption upon our little party. They were under a cloud directly, and silence descended upon them from that moment. To have continued the discussion in which they had been engaged before would have been a thing impossible.

"I suppose I must go," said the devoted Mrs. Penmore at last, and speaking in a whisper.

"Poor thing!" said her husband; "it all falls upon you."

"Shall *I* go?" asked Lethwaite laughing. "Look here, Mrs. Penmore," he added, "give it to her."

Gabrielle smiled. "It's she who gives it to me," she said. All this time she was lingering near the door, putting off the "*mauvais quart d'heure*." Suddenly there came a

sharp ring at the bell upstairs. Mrs. Penmore heard it and vanished.

The two men sat there together and waited.

"You talk about my affairs and my difficulties," said Lethwaite, after a while; "but what are they to yours? I have only myself to think of; you are differently situated."

"The two ends are alarmingly far apart," answered Penmore, trying to make a joke of it, "and the bringing them together is a gymnastic exercise requiring considerable strength and activity. By the bye I have not thanked you for giving me that chance with the attorneys. What a failure it was!"

"The vulgar brutes!" replied our partisan; "how I hated them! I should have liked to kick them downstairs."

"Assaults are expensive luxuries, and you can't afford them now."

"But tell me, Penmore," said our cynic, "you are not discouraged?"

"No—not yet," replied the other. "But why don't *you* go in for it, old man—now you have your way to make? *You* have no foreign accent."

"O, out of my way altogether. The

drum's the thing for my intellectual calibre, and that taxes it to the uttermost, I can tell you."

Then these two lapsed once more into silence. They had been talking in a light tone, and treating things that were serious enough as jokes. And yet if their inmost feelings at that moment could have been subjected to inspection, it is much to be questioned whether any great amount of light-heartedness would have been discoverable. They had each been making an effort, and now for a little while each gave it up and gave way to a curious sad feeling—a sort of blight which seemed to have entered the room with Miss Cantanker, and to have remained behind when that lady took her departure. Such influences do descend upon us at times, and it is to little purpose that we fight against their force. Sometimes they mean something, sometimes they mean nothing; but they are sufficiently distressing while they last. When that interruption came which has been already mentioned, our little party of three were enjoying themselves quietly enough. They had partaken together of that meal whose praises have been sung in more eloquent tones than

any to which I can give utterance; and as they sat round the tea-table, it seemed as if they had respectively reached one of those periods in life's journey when there is a pause; when we draw the boat out of the current and moor it to the bank, and get out and rest. Then the messenger came, and they must begin living again,—they must get back to their places on the thwarts and row for dear life.

I have dwelt a little on the quietness of that evening, and have, if I may venture to say so, almost enjoyed it myself; partly, perhaps, because I know that for many a day to come my characters will enjoy no more such calm moments or such peaceful friendly intercourse.

There is trouble at hand, and I have things to tell of which are sad and harrowing, and from the narration of which I seem to shrink; and so I linger over the memory of that pleasant evening, and hesitate to go on to other and more painful scenes.

But men, and women too, require other than pleasant scenes and happy experiences if they are to attain to the glories of heroism. The noblest steel has no easy time of it as it

progresses towards perfection. It is beaten with bitter blows. It is thrust into the furnace to be heated, and then into the ice-brook to be chilled; and some metal there is that cannot bear the test, and some that comes out of it—impregnable.

There are different grades in life, and each involves a different preparation for its right development. There is the common iron with which we scrape the mud from off our feet, and there is the quivering steel which makes a Toledo blade; so there is the high-bred race-horse, and the nag on which the farmer's wife can jog to market: and in all these cases, and many more which might be cited, it will still be found that in proportion to the magnificence of the result will be the fierce severity of the preparation.

“She has been more cruel and more strange than ever,” said poor Gabrielle, coming back, after an interval, into the room where she had left her husband and his friend.

“Why, you have been crying, Gabrielle,” said Penmore.

“Yes, I could not help it; I have been so

angry with myself, for I quite lost my temper for a time; and that horrid woman, the servant, was there and seemed so pleased. What do you think she sent for me about?" asked Gabrielle, interrupting herself.

She paused for an answer, but neither Gilbert nor Lethwaite seemed disposed to hazard a guess, so she went on :

"She sent for me because she felt very poorly, she said, and very sleepy — and I must say she looked both—but there was no chance of her going to sleep, she added, while we made so much noise downstairs in the room underneath."

"Well!" exclaimed Penmore and his friend simultaneously.

"Yes," Mrs. Penmore went on; "she said that she had never heard such a noise in her life; and then she asked who we had got here, and was it not that 'horrid' Mr. Lethwaite—"

"She's sincere, at any rate," remarked the gentleman thus flatteringly alluded to.

"And then," continued Gabrielle, "she wanted to know if you were going, or whether you meant to stop here all night?"

Lethwaite got up immediately, and made for his hat.

“No, no, no !” cried Gilbert, forcing him back into his chair ; “nothing of the sort.”

“Well, it was when she said that,” Gabrielle went on, “that I lost my temper a little. I told her that it was bad taste and wrong to talk like that ; that people were more sensitive about their friends than about themselves ; and a great deal more of the same sort, and I went out of the room still quite angry ; and that horrid Cantanker said ‘Upon my word !’ as I went away, and then I could not help crying, because I was so vexed with myself.”

“I think you were perfectly right to be a little indignant,” said Lethwaite ; “and I should have thought less highly of you if you had not fired up a little in defence of a friend.”

“And she said worse than all that,” said Gabrielle to her husband when their friend was gone. “She actually said that she believed I was in love with Mr. Lethwaite, and that was why I defended him. Gilbert, my darling, do you wonder that I was angry ?”

“This cannot go on,” replied her husband, as if talking to himself.

CHAPTER XV.

A CRISIS.

PENMORE was right. It was not possible that such a state of things should go on. But how was it to be put a stop to? That was the difficulty. Were they to intimate to his cousin, without beating about the bush, that the present state of things was unsatisfactory, and that it would be better that it should come to an end? They could hardly do that. What were they to do?

Gilbert perplexed himself with such questions all through the night. Questions to which no answer came kept him awake and troubled him. Alas, he little knew what an answer to them all might have been given, if he could but have read the short future contained in the next twenty-four hours. What we call Fate moves at such an unequal pace. For weeks and months and years things go on

with a wonderful monotony, and the condition of our affairs undergoes no change whatever; and then a day comes, and in the space of a few hours all is altered. Some one event takes place which involves change in all the rest. One stone slips in the fabric that has stood so long, and lo in an instant the whole building tumbles to pieces. The change takes place so suddenly too. The Gordian knot is cut, not untied, and the whole condition of our affairs is so utterly different in the evening to what it was in the morning, that we can hardly as we lie down at night recognise ourselves as the same beings who got up in the morning with such widely different prospects. At last Gilbert fell asleep towards morning, and dreamed that he had to make a speech in court, that he did not know one single point of the case, that he could not get his gown on, and that his wig had turned into a coal-scuttle; for it is with refreshing imaginings of this sort that we are sometimes reinvigorated after passing a bad night.

Then when he went to sleep his wife awoke, and lay there a prey to dismal thoughts and grim forebodings, such as most of us have at times been acquainted with in the early

morning hours; and she thought of their prospects and quailed. A day pregnant with fate had begun when that morning dawned, though she knew it not. There was no sign—no indication of a day in which more than usual might be expected to happen.

It was a dull morning when Gilbert got up to his day's labour, and he felt jaded and unfit for any thing in consequence of his bad night. Still what he had to do must be done, and the day's labours, profitable or unprofitable, must be gone through; and so he went away without having come to any conclusion as to the course of conduct to be pursued with regard to his cousin, but only resolved that something must be done.

"We will talk about it this evening, Gabrielle," he said as he left the house. He went and sat in court briefless, and for a time well-nigh hopeless. How he envied those judges on the bench, so calm and so prosperous! How simple their lives seemed! how assured were their prospects! There were no signs of care or anxiety upon their faces. They were there to do their duty, and they did it scrupulously; but their responsibility seemed to sit more lightly upon them than might be

expected. Public cares, however pressing, do not eat a man's heart away as personal anxieties do.

Our friend Mr. Craft had a case that came on in court that day, and Gilbert could not help watching it with curiosity, and thinking how much he wished that it had been intrusted to him. He saw his way to such a distinct view of it too, it was quite tantalising. In the course of the defence an opportunity occurred of making a very important point, but the counsel engaged by Mr. Craft failed altogether to take advantage of it, nor did the attorney himself seem to be struck by it. Our briefless friend could not resist. He wrote down his thought hastily on a slip of paper, which he conveyed secretly into Mr. Craft's hand, and presently saw that gentleman get up and whisper eagerly in his advocate's ear. There was a brief whispered conference between these two, and then the barrister, seeing at once the importance of the suggestion, which came, as he supposed, from the attorney, seized hold of it, and indeed used it to such purpose, that from that moment he had it all his own way, and ultimately got his verdict with ease. Mr. Craft made his way to

where Gilbert was standing, when the Court was breaking up.

“Very good ’int that, Mr. Penmore, very good indeed; and much obliged, I’m sure. Showed a good knowledge of law, and what’s almost more, a knowledge of what ’d *do*. Ah, sir, if you was to take to chamber-practice, depend upon it you’d make a ’it yet. You’ve got the head for a lawyer, though you haven’t got the tongue.” And the attorney laughed at his own conceit, and bustled back to talk over the case with his recent client.

It was not much this, but it gave a sort of encouragement to our friend; a little encouragement goes a great way with those who are not used to it. Gilbert thought that he had caught a glimpse of something hopeful in the future, for he was of a sanguine nature; and as he walked home he went over the case which had just been tried once more, and thought if he had had the chance of defending, how he would have done it. The issue of the case so evidently turned on that suggestion of his, the prospects of the defence were so instantly affected by it, that he even allowed himself to hope that the judge on the bench might have observed what had occurred, and

might make such inquiries as would lead to the discovery of who it was that had given Mr. Craft what that gentleman called "a 'int." Poor Gilbert! the judge had noted the point at the time, and seeing how it was pressed had given Mr. Craft's well-known acuteness the credit of the suggestion, as had every body else in the Court. "Sharp fellow that Craft," the gentlemen of the robe had whispered to each other. "I'd rather have him for me than against me, any day."

So Gilbert Penmore went home to dinner in a hopeful mood, and consequently with a good appetite.

He went up the steps quite gaily, and put his key into the door, and opened and shut it with such unaccustomed briskness that his little wife, who was always on the look-out about this time, noticed instinctively to what a gallant measure her husband was marching, and went out into the passage to meet him.

"Has any thing particular happened?" she asked. I believe they were both always expecting that something particular would happen.

"No, dear; nothing very particular," replied her husband carelessly, but with the

pardonable vanity of an ill-understood man. "I had the luck to make rather a good suggestion to-day—that was all." And he told her how it had all happened. And Gabrielle thought she saw him Lord Chancellor, and that the berth was inadequate to his deserts.

And so they infected each other with their good spirits, and were ready to sit down to dinner in a sanguine mood. There are those who will have it that these—rather than the seasons of gloomy foreboding—are the moments in our lives which are to be looked upon with apprehension and alarm, and undoubtedly it does happen not unfrequently that our misfortunes are heralded in by sensations of unaccustomed happiness. If the reverse of this holds true, we may venture to be the less disturbed by sad presentiments.

When Miss Carrington made her appearance at the dinner-table that day she seemed to come provided with the means of casting a shadow over every thing. The very tablecloth seemed to take a lower tone, and there was not a bit of sparkle left in the electroplate. She had a dreadful way of establishing herself at table as if for some serious business, and was always at this time fostered with

especial care by her attendant, who had an aggravating way of ducking under the table with a footstool, and coming to the surface again with a determination of blood to the head, and an expression of martyrdom very trying to witness. This done, Miss Cantanker would place by her mistress a decanter of a peculiarly hideous character, containing some wine which had been specially ordered for her by Captain Scraper, and in which she had the most implicit confidence.

"I don't think I shall want any to-day, Jane," said Miss Carrington rather faintly.

"Begging your pardon, miss, you do want it, and this day most particular; for you are low, and must be kept up."

It certainly did seem to be the case that Miss Carrington was in want of some assistance from without in the way of a stimulant. She looked both depressed and ill, and appeared to be not in the sweetest of tempers. As the meal advanced, and under the influence of certain doses of Captain Scraper's cordial, she seemed to rally, however, a little, and was able to make herself generally agreeable by keeping up a running conversation with her domestic.

“You heard from my former servant, your married niece, to-day, Jane, didn’t you?”

“Yes, miss,” replied Miss Cantanker, “I did.”

“Good news, Jane, I hope.”

“No, miss. The news was not good, and coming from that quarter it very seldom is. The baby is taken bad with croup, and the youngest but one have got the measles at the same time. Her husband, miss, is out of work, and has taken to drinking, because he says his home’s so miserable.”

“O, that *is* bad,” said Gabrielle, ever ready to conciliate. She was not to be allowed, however, to sympathise in this case, as Miss Cantanker took care to insinuate by continuing to talk to her mistress, and taking no notice of Mrs. Penmore’s remark.

“The rent is all behind, miss,” continued the fair creature, “and the bailiffs is to be put in possession immediate.”

“Well, Jane,” remarked her mistress with a *soupçon* of annoyance in her tone, “when I asked for news of your married niece, I expected something very different from this.”

“Ah, and so did I, miss; and many’s the

bitter tear I've shed over that very letter, as goodness knows."

There could be no doubt that this was an exhilarating kind of thing. It was an exhilarating thing for Miss Carrington, who had her domestic with her all day long, to take this opportunity of discoursing with her, and in addition to this the subject of conversation which had been chanced upon was one eminently qualified to raise the spirits of persons not overburdened with pecuniary resources.

Penmore tried hard to turn the conversation into some more satisfactory channel, but not to much purpose. We all know what turning a conversation is. Stemming a mountain torrent is child's play to it.

The conversation turned itself presently, but the new channel was rather a muddy one, it must be owned.

There came up a dish which was not so fortunate as to find favour in the eyes of Miss Carrington. This is a faithful history, an attempt to present things as they really are; and it must be frankly acknowledged that the dish was a failure. It was of the nature of a hash, or vamp-up, and he who should have said that it was both watery and tasteless

would only have spoken the words of truth, bitter though such words might have been.

“Jane,” said Miss Carrington, laying down her knife and fork, “what did my last medical attendant say was the kind of nourishment best suited to my constitution?”

Miss Cantanker’s answer was oracular.

“‘Your mistress,’ he said, taking me aside as he left the house, ‘is of a delicate constitution, and requires nootrimment—nootrimment, Mrs. Cantanker,’ he says, ‘in every think, if you please. The best of roast and the best of biled, but always fresh meat, and never any think in the way of ’ashes or kickshaws of any sort or kind.’ Those, miss, was his very words.”

“I’m very sorry,” put in poor Gabrielle; “but the fact is there was so much of the leg of mutton left yesterday that I didn’t know what was to be done with it. I gave the servant the most particular directions, and it ought to have been quite strong and nice.”

“Don’t attempt to eat it, miss. I can do you something with nootrimment in it for supper,” whispered Miss Cantanker.

“O, this is not all,” said Gabrielle quickly—she had heard the Cantanker utter-

ance as had indeed been intended. "There is a fowl coming," she added.

There *was* a fowl coming—something like a fowl—with bones that would have been big enough for the substructure of an eagle, with legs that no mortal hand could dissever, with muscles and tendons that must have made the animal the terror of the dunghill; and a mature fowl too—none of your paltry little unfledged chicks with nothing on them. After wrestling with this veteran for some time, and till his arms actually ached, Gilbert at last laid down the knife and fork, one on each side of the animal, and fairly burst into a roar of laughter. He had been annoyed inexpressibly by what had been going on during the meal, had had the greatest difficulty in keeping his temper, and now the pent-up feeling had found a vent—it didn't matter what—a vent! The worst of it was too that Gabrielle caught the infection, and after resisting as long as she could went into fits also. Miss Carrington became on the instant a perfect monument of gravity, and this made the other two so much worse that it seemed as if they would never recover themselves. It soon became painful to both of them, but still there was no stopping it.

They left off and began again. They tried to talk, but to no purpose. They even, as each confessed to the other afterwards, thought over all their troubles and sources of anxiety—of which Heaven knows they had enough—but strange to say even that was of no use, but seemed if any thing to make them laugh more than ever.

Now such laughter as this generally—if not always—occurs at the wrong moment, and the very feeling that it is so makes it the more uncontrollable. This was certainly not the right season for such mirth. Miss Carrington was sitting by, as has been said, a monument of gravity, and her colleague was standing behind her chair erect and solemn. Each fresh burst of laughter was evidently regarded by both as a fresh insult, while so far from being infected by it, their gravity increased every moment.

At length Miss Carrington condescended to ask her attendant what Mr. and Mrs. Penmore were laughing at.

“It is such a preposterous piece of ill-luck,” stammered Gilbert as well as he could, for the fit was not over. He was engaged now in sawing off a sort of flake of what is called

white-meat from each side of the breast-bone ; one of these, when they were at last amputated, he sent to his cousin, and the other to his wife. Then he went to work heroically at a leg on his own account—a great, stringy, scaly, black leg it was too.

“I cannot possibly eat this,” said Miss Carrington, abandoning her flake after a single ineffectual attempt to cut a piece off it.

“Don’t attempt it, miss,” urged the lovely Cantanker ; “you was to partake of nothing, you know, but what was easy of digestion.”

“It is very unfortunate,” began Gabrielle, still twitching a little with suppressed laughter.

“It is indeed,” replied Miss Carrington. “One gets nothing to eat. There must be some means of knowing whether a fowl is fit to eat or not before it comes to table.”

“It is very difficult to tell. I thought this looked quite a fine one. But I don’t think I shall be taken in again.”

There was a pause here, broken by nothing but the sound of Penmore’s knife coming into violent collision with his plate, as the weapon glanced off from impregnable positions in the neighbourhood of the drum-stick.

“Don’t you think that it would be possible for you to get a better cook?” suggested Miss Carrington after a time.

“I am afraid we could hardly afford it,” said Gabrielle; and then she added “just yet,”—with an eye to futurity.

There was another pause after this, disturbed by the same music as before. When it had lasted some time, it was once more broken by Miss Carrington.

“I really—had—no idea,” she said; as if it had occurred to her for the first time, “what a dreadful thing it is to be poor.”

“We don’t complain,” said Gilbert, trying to speak cheerfully, though he felt rather indignant. “We don’t expect first-rate cookery or first-rate attendance. We intend to attain to both in due time—don’t we, Gabrielle?—and in the mean time we wait with such patience as we have at command.” Penmore looked across at his wife, and saw that she was fuming a little under that allusion to their poverty on the part of his cousin.

“But it really was such a very courageous thing—in both of you, I mean, of course—to go and set up a household without the means and against every body’s consent. I really quite

admire it. It was romantic, and there is so little romance nowadays."

"It was courageous on *somebody's* part, though not on mine, that I can see," said Gilbert; and he looked encouragingly across at his wife, who was with difficulty keeping down her indignation at the turn which the conversation had taken. She smiled at him, but it was through her tears.

This determination on the part of Penmore to stick to his colours, and his entire indifference to her suggestion, enraged Miss Carington to fury-pitch.

"O! but I hold that it *was* courageous and romantic too," she said, still with the same sneer; "because you might have had all sorts of opportunities, you know."

She got no farther. Gabrielle had controlled herself and fought against herself thus far with all her might. But this last was too much. This insinuation, before her too, was more than she could bear. We have said that there was West-Indian blood in her veins, and that although she was so gentle and affectionate, that blood could at last be roused. It tingled now in every vein.

"For shame! for shame!" she cried, hastily

rising and flying to her husband's side; "you must be wicked,—worse than wicked,—to say such words; such hints come ill from any woman's lips, and worst of all from yours,—yours that would have given such a glad assent if Gilbert—*my* Gilbert—had but spoken to you the words which he spoke to me."

"Hush, Gabrielle—hush, my pet. It is not worth while—"

"No, Gilbert, my darling, let me speak. You don't know her, and how she's always trying to hint at what I've said. It was for you she came here. I see it all now. You cannot expect me to bear such infamy, or even to check any longer the anger which I feel. O, she is too wicked—too wicked to live!" And the poor girl sank down on her knees beside her husband and burst into an agony of tears.

Gilbert drew her towards him and tried to quiet her, but the tempest was wild and sudden as the storms which rage round those islands where the girl was born, and the calm was still far off.

As for Miss Carrington, she had at first absolutely quailed before that most righteous indignation. She turned from white to red and

from red to white again, nor did she trust herself to speak till she could regain that sarcastic tone in which she had spoken at first.

“After such a display of emotion, to call it by a mild term, as this, I think it will be better for me to retire. If I am unworthy to live at all, I am certainly especially unworthy to live in the presence of such injured purity. Meanwhile, I must frankly own that I am sorry for you, Mr. Penmore.”

“O, let her go — let her go,” murmured Gabrielle, still sobbing convulsively on her husband’s breast.

“After what has happened—” Gilbert began, addressing his cousin.

“O, you need not be afraid,” answered this last. “After what has happened, it is, as you were going to say no doubt, better that all intercourse should cease between us. The intentions with which I originally came here have been misinterpreted, and the foulest aspersions have been cast upon my character. There is an end of every thing between us.”

It is not to be supposed that a scene of such a painful nature as this which I have attempted to describe could reach its termination without the introduction into it of

some element of the more grotesque sort. Miss Cantanker, who had remained silent all this time, and who had indeed worn the appearance of one so utterly paralysed and overwhelmed with astonishment as to have lost all power of speech,—now when she saw her mistress about to leave the room burst out into a tirade of frenzied eloquence, such as is not often heard.

“Yes !” she exclaimed, looking around her with flashing eyes, “and if my mistress had listened to me it’s long enough ago that all this would have been brought to an end. To come to a ’ouse like this, where the very beds is of iron, like a workus or a prison, in place of her nice four-poster, with hangings like a Christian’s should be, and valance round the bottom ;—to get nothing to eat but what’s unfit to set before a dog, and she ordered in a special way to have her nootrimment of the daintiest and the best ;—to have all this to undergo, and her own devoted servant also annoyed and put upon at every turn, with a dog-hole offered her to sleep in, and required to take her meals with an ignorant servant-of-all-work that could not spell her own name : and besides all this, to be insulted

and told she wasn't fit to live;—why, 'tis enough to make one's very spirit bust with rage, and leave the 'ouse at wunst without so much as waiting for a cab—”

At this point Miss Cantanker's address was cut short by her mistress, who, telling her to be silent and to follow her immediately, made at once for the door. Before she passed through it she turned round and, addressing Gilbert again, said :

“It will be necessary that I should see you once more in order to make a final settlement of a business nature. If you please, we will say at nine o'clock to-morrow.”

And with that she left the room.

TO-MORROW !

CHAPTER XVI.

DOWN IN THE WORLD.

ON that same evening, the commencement of which was signalised by that painful scene in the house in Beaumont Street which was narrated in the last chapter, Mr. Julius Lethwaite sat in his new lodgings, smoking his pipe, and talking over business matters with that devoted personage, Jonathan Goodrich.

The new rooms formed a striking contrast to the old, and were situated on the third floor of a house in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn. These rooms were small and poorly furnished. Only two or three articles, special favourites with their proprietor, had been retained by him, when the St. James Street rooms were given up; an easy-chair, a small clock that would go, and one or two prints. He had kept a certain number of his books too, and these, together with the engravings before alluded to, gave the apartment at any

rate a humanised look, and prevented it from being utterly bare and desolate in appearance. A small door led into a bedroom, which adjoined the sitting-room; and these two apartments formed the modest residence of Mr. Julius Lethwaite.

There were tea-things on the table, and there was a tin-kettle on the fire, at which Mr. Goodrich was in the act of toasting that delicious engine of destruction, a muffin.

“I bought it myself,” said Mr. Lethwaite, laying aside his pipe as a preliminary step to be taken before it was possible to engage in the meal before him. “I mean to live upon them. They are very cheap and exceedingly satisfying.”

“Ah, sir, don’t you talk like that, even in joke,” said poor Goodrich, as he turned the deadly morsel.

“But it’s not a joke, Jonathan. I always wanted to live upon muffins when I was a boy, but parents and guardians, schoolmasters and other oppressors wouldn’t stand it; now there’s nobody to stop me, thank goodness, so I’ll try the experiment.”

“Ah, sir, you’d soon have to drop *that*,” said the old clerk, who had not the power of

taking in a pleasant idea; "no digestion could stand a diet of muffins. Even one now and then's a trial."

"You're an authority on questions of health, I know, Jonathan."

"Yes, sir. I generally have an eye to matters of that sort in my diet; and as to physicking, I do something in that way too now and then. But I never take a drop or a grain of any sort or kind except on Saturdays, because it might otherwise interfere with business."

"But you couldn't stick to that, you know, if you had a serious illness," said Lethwaite, willing to draw the old fellow out.

"Well, sir, I believe that was how I fell into that illness which I had when you were so good to me. It was a bad illness that," said the old man in a retrospective tone; "and it began to threaten me on a Monday, and on the Tuesday I had to go to the doctor on my way in to business. 'Now, instead of going in to business,' he says, 'you just go straight home, and get into bed, and put on half-a-dozen leeches; and get this prescription made up, and take the mixture directly, as indicated.' That's what he said, quite energetic. 'I thank you

kindly, sir,' I said in answer; 'but I never do any thing in the way of physicking and that except on Saturdays, lest it should interfere with business.' He seemed quite aghast at that. 'Why, man,' he said, almost irritably, 'you are suffering from the premonitory symptoms of inflammation of the lungs, and if you put off the legitimate treatment, you may kill yourself; while if you have recourse to it at once, you may avert the inflammation, and get well again in no time.' 'Thank you kindly, sir,' was my answer, 'but not till Saturday. I never *have* taken medicine except on Saturday, and, please goodness, I never *will*.' 'Very well,' says he, 'I've done my duty at any rate, and I wash my hands of it.' Ah, well, I fought on, and fought on for a day or two longer, but I was forced to give in at last; and by the Thursday night I was in a fever, and out of my mind, as nobody knows better than you, sir."

"Yes, and wanting to go down to the office in your raving fit, and crying out that it would all go wrong unless you did; and now you see, you old goose, it's all gone wrong in spite of your being there every day of your life. So you see you've been no good after all."

“Not much, I’m afraid, sir,” said the poor old fellow.

“But seriously now, Jonathan, is it all up with us?”

“I’m afraid, sir, it’s no use our attempting to go on,—but, O, sir, where are all your watch-making things? You’ve never been and parted with them?” He spoke as one would to a child of its playthings.

“Yes, Jonathan, I have. The fact is, they were worth money, and I never should have made any thing of it.”

“O dear! O dear! what a dreadful business it is! And your drums?”

“My drums I’ve got still, only they’re not set up yet. My drums are different, Jonathan; I’m going to get a living out of them.”

“Get a living out of *them*!—only to think of it.”

“Yes, to be sure; I shall play on them in an orchestra; at a theatre, you know. You’ve been at a theatre?”

“O yes, years ago though; and I remember thinking that the drums made such a noise that they spoilt it all. You couldn’t hear the rest of the music for them.”

“Ah, the man who played had not suf-

ficient self-control probably. You shall come and hear me perform one of these nights."

"No, sir, no, I thank you," said the old man sadly; "I shouldn't like to do that at all—the head-partner in Lethwaite and Gamlin; no, no. But what am I talking about? Lethwaite and Gamlin won't be in existence soon. Ah, dear me! ah, dear me!" And Jonathan Goodrich leant his head forward, and covered his face with his hands.

"Come, Jonathan, old man—this won't do, you know," cried his employer in a cheery tone; "why it's you that ought to be keeping my courage up, not I keeping up yours." There is little doubt that our light-hearted friend was really more sorry for old Goodrich than he was for himself.

"Yes, sir, yes, that's true enough, that's quite true; but, O, sir, to think of your watch-making things being parted with, that's upset me more than all the rest. And then to hear you talk about drumming in an orchestra, and living on muffins—the head-partner in Lethwaite and Gamlin blowing himself out with muffins—O, sir, it's too much, it's too much!"

"But I wasn't in earnest, you know that well enough, Jonathan; you can't take a joke."

“O yes, I can, sir; but this is no joke—no joke at all. These rooms ain’t like rooms belonging to you, sir. No drums, and no watch-making things; and then where’s—where’s the pictures?”

“Well, you needn’t ask.”

“What, they gone too? Why, there was one of the red-house at Rochampton where your revered father used to live, and where you yourself was brought up, sir.”

“O, I’ve kept that back, Jonathan.”

“Ah, well, I’m glad to hear that, at any rate. An uncommon pretty picture that was, But, law, sir, this is but a poor place. These chairs are only covered with cotton damask, and they’re so hard and stiff, that you’d think that they didn’t want you to sit down upon them. And here’s this table, it’s only veneered, and not firm either, as these claw tables seldom are. And that’s your bedroom, is it?” continued the old man, who was going candle-in-hand round the rooms. “Ah, dear, what a change! O dear! O dear! no curtains, and an iron bedstead that rattles like a bunch of keys; the legs of the chairs all different lengths; and no wardrobe for all your clothes and things. And as to this chest of drawers,”

continued the old man, approaching one of which all the drawers were more or less open, "I can see by the look of it that it will go nigh to break your heart before you've done with it. Yes, I thought as much," he went on, after trying some of the drawers and finding that they would neither open nor shut, "I thought as much. Those drawers alone are enough to drive you mad, sir,—you that are used to have things so different."

"The chest of drawers *is* a trial, Jonathan, I confess," said Lethwaite, "and the language into which I have been betrayed already in connection with it would frighten you."

"It's damp weather just now, sir. Perhaps they won't stick so much when it's dry."

"Ah, that's a poor consolation, Jonathan, because that if the damp weather does take its departure for a time, it will come back again, and then they'll stick again."

And so they went round the rooms, the old clerk shaking every thing, and poking at every thing, and disparaging every thing, as utterly unfit for the use of the head-partner in Lethwaite and Gamlin's.

"There's neither head-partner nor tail-partner now," said Mr. Lethwaite, in reply

to what his clerk had advanced; "you forget that, Jonathan."

"No, I don't forget any thing about it, sir; but I do think that you've been a little bit premature in selling off and parting with all your things, and getting rid of your rooms in St. James Street, and coming down in the world like this. There was no need for such a sudden pull-up, I do assure you. You've no idea, sir, how ready every one would have been to help you—in the City, I mean."

"Better as it is, Jonathan, depend on it. It would be all very well at first, but I know human nature, and when they found that there was no money forthcoming, they would begin to look disagreeable at us."

"You're mistaken, sir; you are indeed," urged the old man eagerly. "There are 'ouses, and first-rate 'ouses too, that would stand by you well, if it was only for your late father's sake, and the respect they bore him. Ah, sir, you don't know the City."

"I know human nature."

"Well, sir, I wouldn't be too sure of that, if you'll excuse me for saying so. You know one side of human nature—the selfish side, but there's another, and one better worth studying,

you may depend, and that's the generous side. Ah, sir, they'd trust your father's son in the City."

"Yes, and then when my father's son, as you call him, couldn't pay—what would they say? No, no, my father's son will pay every thing off as far as his money will go, and then he'll go and drum in an orchestra and get more; and he'll think there's nothing derogatory to his father's name in earning an honest penny in that way or any other, provided it is honest."

The old man shook his head and turned up his eyes in horror. He was quite unable to get over the drumming-part of the business; it stuck in his throat as the muffins did—figuratively.

"O, you obstinate old villain!" continued Lethwaite, breaking out as usual into the language of affectionate vituperation. "I declare that if I didn't feel convinced that it would be no use, and that you wouldn't go, I'd turn you out of my employment this very day. By the bye, though, now I think of it, you *must* go. There will be no office for you to attend soon—I'm so glad—and you'll be obliged to accept some comfortable appointment some where else."

“Not if I can help it, sir. I’ve saved a little money—thanks to your liberality and that of your revered father—and as long as that will last I shall wait.”

“Wait, and for what, you old—aggravator?”

“Wait for you, sir, in case you want me. There’s no telling, sir,” he continued, anxious to prevent Mr. Julius from getting in a word edgeways—“There’s no telling. Something may come of those American securities yet.”

“You hear this man,” interrupted Lethwaite calmly, and addressing an imaginary jury of mad-doctors or lunacy commissioners; “You hear this man, and allow him to be at large.”

“Ah, it’s all very well, sir, but something *may* come of them, and all that cotton that’s ware’oused at Augusta may be got at yet, and then we might go on again still; yes, and then (for all he’s an old goose, and an old pump, and an old aggravator—which I won’t deny) you may want the services of Jonathan Goodrich yet; and then where should I be if I’d got some other occupation and couldn’t come—why, it would go near to break my heart—that it would.”

“Ah, Jonathan, you’re building castles in the air to an extent which, at your time of life, is fearfully disgraceful; but I’ll tell you what—if ever what you have said should come about, the firm shall have a new name in it, and shall be Lethwaite and Goodrich instead of Lethwaite and Gamlin.”

There is no need to give the good old man’s reply. The conversation, which turned upon business matters, was soon after interrupted by the arrival of Gilbert Penmore. He was passing from one newspaper-office to another, and his friend’s new lodgings being all in the way, had come in to make a proposal which he and Gabrielle had concocted between them.

“I’ve just snatched a moment,” said Gilbert, “in passing, to come in and have a look at your new lodgings. Well, I don’t know, I’m sure,” he continued, looking about him; “they’re rather dingy, aren’t they? Perhaps it’s the comparison which they suggest with the old. What do *you* say, Mr. Goodrich.”

“Well, sir, I’ve just been expressing to Mr. Lethwaite my opinion that he’s gone to work too suddenly, and come down too ra-

pidly. It's a sad pokey place, sir; and there's a chest of drawers!"

"O, never mind the chest of drawers," said Lethwaite, laughing. "I can give them up altogether, if the worst comes to the worst, and live out of my portmanteau."

"The fact is," said Gilbert, "I've rather an interested motive in disparaging these rooms, because I want you to come and take ours."

"Yours? Why, they're taken already. Hasn't Miss Carrington—"

"Miss Carrington is going to leave. We have had rather an unpleasant scene with her, and it was agreed that we had better part."

"And when does she go?"

"To-morrow."

"O, I'll come of course. I shall be only too delighted. Jonathan, any day after to-morrow you'll find me at Mr. Penmore's; you know where."

"I don't know whether we can be ready so soon as that," said Gilbert; "but if not you shall hear. It's very kind of you, though, to be ready to fill up our vacancy so quickly."

"So far from that, it is one of the profoundest pieces of selfishness which could be

conceived. I shall be in clean and comfortable quarters. I shall be incomparably better looked after than I am here; and I shall have the society I like without going across the threshold for it. O, don't imagine that you've caught me at a good action, whatever you do."

"I've caught you at a good many before now."

"Never; nor any body else. I get more confirmed in my opinions as to the depravity of human motive every day I live. There's only this old file," he continued, pointing to Mr. Goodrich, "whom I can't make out. I can't conceive why he doesn't throw me overboard and secure some better berth while he can."

The old man shook his head and smiled.

"You're always at your jokes, Mr. Julius," he said.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FATAL MISTAKE.

THE evening which followed after that painful scene narrated in the last chapter, when the feeling, so long pent up in Gabrielle Penmore's breast, at length found a vent, was one of those which Gilbert was compelled to pass away from home.

Poor Gabrielle, then, was left alone, and with plenty of leisure to reflect upon the miserable circumstances which had just taken place. She was not sparing in self-reproach, though Heaven knows there was small enough ground for it. What provocation had she not received! How long and how patiently had she endured before her brief anger was allowed to have its way! But there are consciences and consciences, and a very small load will weigh more on some minds than a very great one will do on others. There are some whose consciences will not allow them to look over

the hedge, and some who may steal the horse and yet feel quite comfortable, only anxious as to whether they will be found out or not.

Gabrielle was alone, and she fell to brooding over this matter. Had her husband been there, it would have been otherwise; but there was no one to comfort her and tell her how justifiable her irritation had been. A judicious friend would have been invaluable at this time, but Gabrielle had just now but very few friends. The fact that both she and her husband had been brought up and had lived among those far-distant islands during the time when friendships are mainly contracted was one reason of this, while another was to be found in their poverty. Since the time of their marriage they had been so continually engaged in the struggle necessary to make both ends meet, that they had had little leisure for forming acquaintances, which could also only be kept up by means of an increased expenditure. An English governess, who had lived with the Descartes family for many years, and who was now settled in London, was almost the only friend whom Gabrielle possessed.

So, being alone that evening, poor Mrs.

Penmore brooded over her troubles, and made them out in consequence much worse than they were. Miss Carrington was her guest, she reflected, and as such had the greatest of claims on her forbearance. Then she had lately appeared to be in very indifferent health, and that might very well be partly the reason of her being cross-grained and unkind. Then Gabrielle thought of the advances which this lady had made to Gilbert; and this certainly could not be accounted for or excused by illness or aught else; but then came another consideration—might not she herself have been mistaken about these same advances, and might she not have attributed to Miss Carrington feelings which had never entered that lady's head? She was Gilbert's cousin, and did not that justify her in adopting a somewhat affectionate tone?

And now this gentle soul began to think to herself how much she should like to be reconciled to her enemy, and to speak to her some few words of a more kindly sort than those which they had last exchanged. And yet what a difficult thing this would be to manage! They had parted in anger. Such words had passed between them as would make their

next meeting a very awkward one, to say the least. Indeed, she had no reason to believe that Miss Carrington would consent to another meeting. How could it be managed? Should she send up and ask whether Miss Carrington would receive her? The probable answer would be that she was too much indisposed to do so.

Mrs. Penmore sat and pondered for a long time over all sorts of different schemes of reconciliation, rejecting one after another. At last she hit upon one that seemed better than the rest, and it found favour in her eyes. There hinged upon her decision more than she had even dreamed of.

It has been mentioned in a former chapter of this narrative that it was always Miss Carrington's custom to partake of some refreshment—something in the shape of supper—the last thing at night. Sometimes it would be a basin of broth, sometimes cold meat, or sometimes only bread and cheese and porter. This last was never omitted, as it had been medically prescribed for her.

This meal was always taken upstairs by the faithful Miss Cantanker, and at nine o'clock every night she was to be encountered on the

stairs bearing the tray, and in a state of great importance. It was in connection with this ceremonial that an idea entered the mind of Mrs. Penmore, on which she determined to act without delay. She rose from her chair, and, opening the door of the room in which she had been sitting, passed out into the little passage.

Ah! Gabrielle Penmore, go back! abstain from that which you are about to do. Cast from you, as you would a dangerous reptile, that thought which has come into your mind. Act not upon it, for there is danger in it. Go back and shut the door of the room upon yourself, and sit there quietly till your husband comes;—for know that if you go on with that which you are about to do, the consequences of your act will involve both you and him in misery such as you have neither of you known before!

But Gabrielle went on her way without misgiving or fear. She descended the stairs and arrived before the kitchen door, paused for a moment,—for she was, as many young housekeepers are, rather afraid of the kitchen,—then she tapped gently at the door and went in.

Miss Cantanker, with a very red face, was

standing over the fire preparing some poached eggs, while the wretched Charlotte, with her mouth wide open, as it always was when in the presence of her tormentor, stood by holding the light, and indeed every thing else that was likely to be wanted for the culinary process, in which the Cantankerous one was engaged.

Cantanker turned hastily round when Mrs. Penmore entered, and Charlotte dropped the extinguisher, the snuffers, and a buttery knife with a crash like a salute.

“You are preparing Miss Carrington’s supper, are you not?” asked Gabrielle, addressing the heated lady. Miss Cantanker had Charlotte to reprove before she could trouble herself about Charlotte’s mistress.

“You stupid gawky owl!” she said, “dropping things about like that—how dare you?—Yes, Mrs. Pingmore, I ham,” she added, after a pause, and going on with what she was about.

“It has quite a good smell,” remarked Gabrielle, anxious to be agreeable. To this observation, however, she received no reply.

There *was* a good smell, no doubt. Jane Cantanker was an artist. She had about her every thing she was likely to want. The pieces

of toast on which the eggs were to repose stood crisp and ready, and the eggs themselves showed a golden tint through their whiteness which was irresistible.

“I want to ask a great favour,” said Mrs. Penmore, hesitatingly. “It is that I may be allowed to take Miss Carrington’s supper upstairs.”

If Gabrielle had offered to take Miss Cantanker herself upstairs in her arms, that worthy lady could hardly have been more wildly astonished. She stood with the frying-pan in one hand and the kitchen spoon in the other, staring at Mrs. Penmore with a stony gaze as if for the time she really could not get the nature of her request into her head. As to making any reply, it appeared as if nothing could be farther from her thoughts.

“Well, what do you say?” asked Gabrielle again, after this silence had lasted some time.

“Say,” repeated the hand-maiden; “why, I hardly know what *to* say. You must be out of your mind, Mrs. Pingmore;” and she stared harder than ever.

“But surely there is nothing so very extraordinary in my request,” replied Gabrielle, smiling. “I want to say something to Miss

Carrington, and to wish her good night,—and —and this would be a good opportunity.”

“‘Say something,’ yes, I should think you did, after what passed at dinner-time.”

Gabrielle turned crimson at this rough allusion, but she was prepared for disagreeables and stuck to her point.

“Well,” she said, “what do you say? will you let me have the tray?”

Cantanker again took time to consider this outrageous proposition, before she replied:

“I’ve taken up my mistress’s meals ever since she was old enough to want meals at all, and it’s my place; and I can’t for the life of me see what business—if you’ll excuse *me*, Mrs. Pingmore—it can possibly be of yours. I have no wish to let others than myself attend upon my mistress, and more especially *when* those others is not well-disposed towards her, as is certain in the present case, after what has occurred this very day.”

This, one would naturally have imagined was likely to be final, the more especially as Cantanker was now concluding her preparations and getting every thing ready for her ascent to her mistress’s bedroom. But Gabrielle was in earnest and was not to be put off so easily.

"But I have just told you," she urged, smiling in the most bewitching manner she could, "that it is *because* of what occurred to-day that I want you to let me have my way in this. I don't want to supersede you in your legitimate office; you can come up afterwards and see that Miss Carrington is comfortable for the night. But what I do want is to have this opportunity of paying Miss Carrington a little attention, and of telling her that I bear no malice after what has occurred to-day."

"'Bear no malice!'" retorted this crabbed woman, not willing to lose an opportunity of carping, "no, I should think not. It's them that are injured and insulted that has the right to bear malice, or to let it stand over."

Mrs. Penmore allowed this amiable speech to pass unnoticed, but she felt it nevertheless keenly.

"And how do you know, or how do *I* know," continued Cantanker, "that my mistress would wish to see you, or be attended by you?"

"Yes, but the only way to find that out is to try," said Gabrielle, with another smile.

Importunity and perseverance, and the great system of refusing to take "no" for an

answer were doing their work as usual, and Gabrielle began to think that she saw symptoms of a tendency to relent in her grim antagonist.

"I am sure you will not continue to refuse me what I wish so much," she said.

"It's my place," reiterated the handmaiden, taking up her former position, but more faintly than before, "and I cannot for the very life of me think why I should be asked to go out of my place at this time of day for a fancy;" and this amiable woman looked exceedingly resolute and exceedingly indisposed to yield the point.

"Yes, I know it is a fancy," replied Gabrielle, "and I know it is your place to take up Miss Carrington's supper, and that you like to do so, and that she likes you to do so," added the flatterer; "but I thought that just for once—"

"It's the strangest thing I ever heard of in *my* life," said the icy one, perhaps half a degree thawed by Mrs. Penmore's little compliment. She was standing with the tray, which was now prepared, in both her hands, and staring as before.

"Come," said Gabrielle, and she too took the tray in her hands, and smiled as they both

held it. It looked a very inviting tray,—with a snowy napkin spread over it, the eggs hidden under their bright metal cover, the symmetrical piece of bread by the side, and lastly the stout foaming in its jug.

“Come,” said Mrs. Penmore, “you must let me have the privilege for once.”

Cantanker still looked very sulky: “Well, I wash my hands of it,” she said. “If my mistress is angry *I’m* not to blame.”

But Gabrielle had got the tray, and lost no time in making off with it.

“I never heerd of such a thing in my life,” said Cantanker, again looking after her viciously; and she went on muttering, with a sound like distant thunder. And so she remained standing in the stone corridor outside the kitchen.

Charlotte held a candle at the foot of the kitchen stairs to light her mistress. After that there was the lamp in the passage.

By the time that Gabrielle had reached the first-floor she was so out of breath, between the stairs and her agitation at the thought of what she was doing, that she was obliged to go into the drawing-room, tray and all, to recover herself a little. After that she

proceeded on her mission. She paused again when she had reached Miss Carrington's landing, and putting the tray down on the floor knocked for admittance.

A rather faint voice bade her "come in," and she entered.

The room was dimly lighted. Miss Carrington was seated before the fire in an easy-chair, with her back to the door.

"You are later than usual, Cantanker, aren't you?" she said in a languid voice and without looking round.

Gabrielle felt the awkwardness of the situation very keenly. Her last parting with Miss Carrington, and that but a few hours before, had been certainly in anger. That parting was to be final, and the next day this most unmanageable lady was to leave the house. No doubt this present meeting must be an awkward one.

"I am afraid you will be disappointed," Gabrielle began. At the first sound of her voice Miss Carrington started and turned swiftly round.

"Where is Jane?" she said. "Is any thing the matter?"

"Nothing whatever. I asked for leave to

bring you your supper to-night, and obtained it with great difficulty."

Miss Carrington appeared much bewildered at first, like one newly aroused from sleep. She remained silent and watched all the movements of Gabrielle as she spread the supper things on the table. At length she seemed to notice what was going on, and perhaps to remember that last stormy interview.

"May I ask," she said at last, "to what I must attribute all this attention, and why you have taken upon you this menial office?"

"Well, I wanted an opportunity of coming up to speak to you," said Gabrielle, "and I thought this would be a good one. The last time we met our parting was a very distressing one, and I cannot bear to think of it."

"Then why should you want to break it all up again by alluding to it?" said Miss Carrington, speaking rather peevishly.

"I only wanted to say that I am sorry that any unpleasant words should have passed between us. I didn't like to go to bed without saying 'good-night.'"

Miss Carrington made no answer. She was engaged now with the supper-tray, but she seemed rather to be playing with the food

than eating it. She swallowed a few mouthfuls and then pushed the plate away. But she drank the beer eagerly and with a sort of feverish thirst. "What horrid stuff!" she said, as she finished it. Then she seemed to remember what Gabrielle had said: "You must not imagine," she answered at last, "that I am going to give up my intention of leaving. If you have come with the idea of persuading me to remain, you have troubled yourself uselessly."

"O no, I never thought of such a thing for a moment," was the answer to this somewhat ungracious speech.

"I shall certainly leave to-morrow," continued Miss Carrington; "after what has happened I should not think of remaining longer."

"Yes, but you won't go away in anger. It is better, no doubt, that we should part, but we may part without being enemies."

Miss Carrington did not answer for the moment. She rang the bell, which was responded to in due time by the fair Cantanker.

"You may take these things down, Jane," said her mistress.

"Why, if you haven't been and left them beautiful eggs almost untouched," said the maiden; "it's positively a sin and a shame."¹_E

"I've no appetite this evening," answered the lady. "By the bye, Jane, where did you get that beer? It's the nastiest I ever tasted."

"Well, miss, I tried a new public round the corner. The tap at Mr. Giles', where we have dealt previous, was not a good one, so I thought I would try the other."

"Ah, well, it's worse than the first. But it doesn't matter. It's the last we shall want."

Cantanker retired with the tray, staring as usual at Gabrielle, and seeming to wonder very much what she was doing in her mistress's apartment.

She did not stay there much longer.

"I won't keep you from your rest now," she said; "you look tired."

"I am very tired to-night."

"Good-night, then," said Gabrielle, holding out her hand cordially. "Good-night and good-bye."

Miss Carrington took the proffered hand. She seemed half asleep already. "Good-night," she said, faintly. "Time enough for 'Good-bye' to-morrow."

And so they parted.

Gabrielle went downstairs more satisfied than she had gone up. She had done what she could. She and her guest were not enemies at any rate. Still she felt oppressed and melancholy. What were they to do? Miss Carrington gone, they would be in the same straits to which they were reduced before her arrival. If what had happened that day might have been avoided, things might have gone on tolerably at any rate, and they might have kept their heads above water till Gilbert got that chance which must surely come at last.

Gabrielle was determined to sit up for her husband. She was, indeed, in no humour for rest. A great anxiety for the future had taken possession of her. She tried to look onward and peer into that future which is so mercifully hidden from our gaze. Could she fancy a very different state of things? Could she see her husband and herself in a comfortable home with an assured income—in a word, prosperous and secure? Of course she could not. Can any one when the immediate prospect is dark, and the way to something more brilliant is not discernible, believe that that way is still there though

invisible at present? When the dark side of the cloud is turned towards us can we realise fully the silver lining? Lastly, can any one take a cheerful view of any thing when "sitting up" for somebody in a lonely house?

At last Penmore's key was heard turning in the lock of the street-door, and at that sound the little woman's spirit woke up again. Help, protection, comfort seemed to be at hand. It was a cheerful sound that, somehow. The hand that turned that key was full of strength and energy. That hand belonged to her, as did the man who owned it. And he had come back to help her and take care of her, and the house was lonely no longer.

"Why, how cold you are, and pale, like a little ghost; and what business have you to be up at this time of night?" said Gilbert, as his wife came out into the passage to receive him.

"O, I couldn't go to bed," she answered, "till you came. I have been so nervous and miserable." And then she told him of all that had happened since he left—how she had repented of having let her anger get the better of her, how she had sought a reconciliation with Miss Carrington, and how it had all ended.

“Why, you little goose,” he said, as he drew her towards him, “you have just reversed the right order of things. It was you who were injured and insulted, and it was Miss Carrington who ought to have made peace overtures to you, not you to her. I’m quite ashamed of you.”

But Gabrielle felt happy now, and was soon at rest, and all the house was quiet and still.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOMETHING STRANGE.

THE outsides of our places of abode tell no tales. As we walk down a street in the silent night, and pass the dark shut-up houses that seem so quiet and secure, we forget how much may be going on in each one of them of which the outside gives no sort of indication. In one there is sickness—deadly sickness, which can have but one termination. In another the sufferer is writhing in intolerable pain; to-morrow an eminent surgeon will arrive there to perform a terrible operation. His carriage will draw up here by the kerb-stone, and he will go in at that door to do his fearful work. Here again is a house where Care has taken up his abode, and the master lies awake thinking of his pecuniary difficulties, and of all those children who are to be provided for and brought up. That light in the window

yonder comes from a room in which a young man is drawing his last consumptive breath; and that other farther down from the chamber of a young girl who is to be married to-morrow, and who is sitting up to write to an especial friend the last letter which she will sign with her maiden name.

But not alone do the outsides of our houses fail to tell what is going on within. Even inside, the inhabitants of one room may be entirely ignorant of what is going on in another, and that other close at hand. You go to an inn to pass the night. Every thing looks bright and gay. The waiters bustle about to execute your commands, the gas is kindled in the corridors, the fire burns brightly in your bedroom. In the next chamber to yours there lies a dead body waiting for interment. Further down in the same corridor a newly-born child has just entered on the scene. You know nothing of these things. If matters are going well with you, and your mind is free, you sleep quietly and enjoy your rest. If you have some personal trouble, you are restless and depressed; but it is not because of the death or the birth that you are despondent or cheerful.

So was it in the house in Beaumont Street. The night passed quietly, and the hours succeeded each other in undisturbed silence; and then the dull cold London morning came with a stillness at first, almost greater than that of night, and showing a surprising emptiness in the street, which also wore a curious bare swept look which it had not at other times.

The policeman in his beat came to the corner of Beaumont Street and looked up it and down it, and slowly smote his gloved hands together, for it was somewhat cold. He was not wanted. There was nothing going on, and there were no servant-maids about at this time to talk to; a very ill-looking cat was picking its steps across the street. He looked, and *was*, a bad subject, no doubt; a cat which was up all night as a habit, and made unearthly noises under people's windows. But it was impossible to take him up for that; so the policeman only clapped his hands louder than before to startle the beast, which however he did not succeed in doing, the cat being a wily London one, and a sufficiently accurate judge of distance to know that the policeman was too far off to do him an injury. If it had been a boy with a

stone, I don't say—that would have been different.

The policeman and the cat—types respectively of order and disorder, of respectability and scampishness—had the street to themselves at this time. Soon they had both disappeared, the cat down his own area-steps, the policeman round the corner on the way to other parts of his beat, and the street was bare again. Then an empty cab came rumbling and rattling along on its way to the stables, the horse dead-beat, stumbling at every step, the driver more than half asleep, but mechanically giving the reins a jerk at every stumble. After this there was total stagnation again, till the inevitable little man who is going somewhere early appeared; of course he came—as he always does—briskly, up the area-steps of one of the houses, closing the gate carefully after him, stepping along with exceeding briskness and cheerfulness, and carrying a small glazed black bag in his hand. He was, in due time, succeeded by a servant of early habits who opened the door of one of the houses, and throwing the doormat out upon the steps retired once more within the house. This is a proceeding much

favoured by the sisterhood, and is suggestive of vigorous cleansings to be carried on inside. Perhaps it does instead of them.

By the time that the early servant has executed this performance, the day, though still in its infancy, may be said to have begun. More early servants soon begin to throw out more door-mats, whilst some of the tribe will take to banging one of these useful objects against the area railings quite viciously, as if it was a "missus." The street is for some time now quite in the hands of the early domestics, who speedily abandoning that first mat, retire within and bring out other specimens of the same kind, which they fling upon the pavement, hang upon the area-spikes, and subject generally to every kind of ignominious treatment. The maids-of-all-work do not labour much at this time—the missuses being in bed—but are given to looking about them, to gazing up at the windows of their own residences to make sure that the blinds of their oppressors are still drawn down, and to congregating in twos and threes at the different house-doors, discussing their wrongs, and the best ways of redressing their respective grievances.

This is the time when there is more business done on the ground-floor than we who are upstairs and asleep have any idea of, and pleasure as well as business is the occupation of that hour. The distributors of milk, undisturbed by conscientious scruples in connection with the diluted nature of the article in which they deal, are generally men of cheerful manners and brilliant conversational powers; and these are on their rounds now, and ready to make themselves agreeable. Then there is the gentleman who represents the pig-wash interest, and to whom the thrifty handmaid looks, not only for light gossip, but for solid remuneration. He is a splashy individual this, his cart is frail and rickety, and his horse is small and lean and crest-fallen; but he is popular nevertheless, for he brings money, and money is another word for ribbons. Lastly re-appears the policeman, and he is always welcome.

Since the policeman was last in the street the thoroughfare has altered considerably in appearance. Then he and the disreputable cat had it all to themselves. Since that time the street has come to life. When he was here a little while ago there was nobody to

speak to ; now there is an *embarras de richesse* in this way. He does what he can, however, and is not unsuccessful in pleasing.

A man, bearing the appearance of a navigator, has come into the street, armed with a pickaxe and a crow. This individual pitches upon a particular paving-stone, which looks like all the rest, but to whose disadvantage the labouring man seems to know something, for he proceeds, keeping his eye steadily fixed upon it, to relieve himself of his coat and waistcoat, depositing which on the kerb, he flies at the doomed paving-stone, and loosening it with his pick has it out of its place in no time. Then he becomes suddenly inactive, and falls to feeling his arms and looking about him. He has taken possession, and that is enough. Towards this personage the policeman makes his way slowly and with dignity, in order to question him upon his projects with regard to the paving-stone.

The two stand talking together for some time. They are stationed nearly opposite to the house occupied by the Penmores, which the policeman eyes from time to time, as it is his habit to eye every thing. He observes that the inhabitants of the house are evidently

up and doing, but that the house itself wears rather a disordered aspect, some of the shutters being open, whilst others remain closed, and others again are half shut up; no movement is being made to arrange these matters in a more orderly manner, nor indeed are there any signs of movement or life about the house at all; till suddenly the street-door opens, and Mr. Penmore, with a countenance expressive of great agitation and distress, appears, upon the doorstep, and stands there a moment, apparently uncertain which way to turn. The policeman knows Mr. Penmore by sight, having often lighted him with his lantern when Gilbert has been letting himself into the house late at night.

Penmore seeing the policeman comes across to him at once, and with every indication of extreme haste in his voice and appearance says:

“Where can I find a doctor?”

“Well, sir,” the policeman begins slowly, “it depends upon what kind of doctor—”

“O, quick, quick—any doctor; that is, who understands his business.”

“There is Doctor Giles, sir. He’s medical attendant to the force,—he’s—”

“Where, where? there’s not a moment to lose.”

“Close by, sir, in Henry Street—first house round the corner; is any thing the matter, sir?”

But Gilbert is gone, and the last question is addressed to the empty air.

“Seems as if there was,” says the navigator, answering the policeman’s enquiry.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” replies this last, with the quick perception peculiar to his class, “if there wasn’t somebody ill.”

We have been outside the house long enough. It is time we should look within and ascertain what it is that has brought Mr. Penmore out so early in search of medical help.

While Gilbert was engaged in his dressing-room, at an early hour, he became suddenly aware that something unusual was going on in the house. There was the sound of hurried footsteps moving hither and thither, of the banging of doors, of the voices of persons talking eagerly, but in suppressed tones, and then of some one hastening along the passage outside Penmore’s door, and uttering a kind of sobbing sound intermingled with various ejaculations of dismay and bewilderment. Presently

these sounds ceased for a moment and there was a hurried knocking at the dressing-room door.

“Yes—what is it?—what’s the matter?” asked Penmore.

“O, sir,” answered the servant Charlotte breathlessly, “you’re wanted—directly.” Gilbert opened the door.

“What is the matter?” he asked, seriously alarmed.

“O, sir, Miss Carrington,—she’s—she’s”

“What?” cried Gilbert.

“O, sir, she’s DEAD!”

“Dead—Miss Carrington—what do you mean?”

“I mean that, sir,—that she’s dead.”

At this moment Gabrielle came out of her room just in time to hear the announcement. She and her husband exchanged one look of consternation, and both without a word ascended the stairs that led to Miss Carrington’s room.

At the door Gabrielle paused. She laid her hand upon her husband’s arm to detain him for a moment.

“O, Gilbert,” she ejaculated, “what can this mean?”

Her husband shook his head, and pausing for a moment to press her hand reassuringly, softly turned the handle of the door, and entered the room, Gabrielle following him.

One glance told them that they were in the presence of Death !

The room was darkened and in considerable disorder. Every thing was as it had been left overnight, or pushed aside in the morning confusion. The chair on which Miss Carrington had been seated when Gabrielle last saw her was in the same spot. The small table on which the supper-tray had been placed was drawn up beside it. Articles of apparel were scattered here and there, and the dressing-gown which Miss Carrington had worn on the previous night lay on the great arm-chair. The embers of the fire that had died out still encumbered the grate.

Another fire had died out that night, or during the long morning which followed it. On the bed placed against the wall in the middle of the room—and this was orderly arranged at least—lay the body of Diana Carrington. Already the limbs had been composed by loving hands which were even now finishing the pious work. The servant was rendering the last

service to the mistress whom she had loved—the last homage which one human being can offer to another. It has not been our fortune in this narrative to see much of the good side of either of these two, but we have seen enough to feel sure that at least they were attached to each other.

On the features of the dead lady there was set that stamp which gives a dignity of its own to every face on which it is impressed—the stamp of Death. No one could look upon that countenance and bear malice or remember wrong or indignity. The majesty of Death was there, and Gabrielle felt it as she stood and gazed upon the corpse from a distance and alone.

Alone; for her husband, after one hasty glance at the dead woman, had whispered hurriedly that he would go to seek a medical man, and had left the room, while as to her who was still engaged about the body, she was at present too much absorbed in her awful task to make Gabrielle's solitude less isolated. Indeed, for the time this woman seemed unconscious that she was not alone in the room. Great gasping sobs burst from her as she proceeded with her work, and the tears, like an extreme unction of love, fell fast upon her mistress's body.

She had been the nurse of the woman who lay there dead, and she had carried her in her arms and ministered to her so incessantly and carefully that she had got to look upon her as a daughter, and to love her with that sort of fierce affection which belonged to her tigrish nature. The work she was now engaged in was congenial to her, and she would have died herself rather than have allowed another to do it. No hands but hers for *that* work.

And Gabrielle stood and looked on, hardly knowing what she had best do. She was afraid to come forward, lest she should seem to intrude, while she felt as if to remain still was to appear unfeeling and almost insensible. At last her kind nature settled the question. This woman's sorrow touched her heart, and she made a step or two forward intending to speak some words of sympathy and kindness.

Her first movement seemed to disturb Jane Cantanker at her work, and she turned hastily round: the very tears seemed to dry up in her eyes as she looked at Gabrielle, and she stood between her and her dead mistress.

"Keep back," she said, in a hoarse voice; "you shall not come nigh her. What do you want here at all?"

Gabrielle's consternation was utter. She was not prepared for this. Such fierce anger, and in the very presence of the dead too.

"I only came because I thought I might be of some use, or some comfort at any rate," she said.

"'Comfort!' what do you mean by 'comfort?'" cried the woman, still standing before the bed in a menacing attitude; "I hate the sight of you, I tell you. What right have you to come into the room where *she* is? It's insulting the dead. I wonder you have the boldness to do it. But I'll be revenged upon you yet. I know something, and I'll be avenged and so shall *she*, poor lamb," she added, pointing to the corpse. "I've watched you—watched you closely—and I know what's been in your mind this long time with your quiet creeping ways; and I know too what's been in *my* mind, and what's there still, I tell you."

The woman had changed. There was nothing of the ridiculous about her now. She was a Fury, a Sibyl of old denouncing vengeance. We have laughed at Jane Cantanker in these pages before now, but there was no laughing at this. It was too dreadful.

"What hand have you had in this?" the fu-

rious woman broke out again, and pointing once more to the dead body. "Yes, you may well start. What have you had to do with it? You hated her, you know you did. You thought she wronged you, and you hated her according. And now she's dead, and you think yourself revenged—but who's to revenge her, think you? O, you shall hear of it again, whatever you may think, and that quickly."

This scene, so sudden, so unexpected, so terrible, was almost too much for Gabrielle,—she trembled and her knees shook under her.

"I don't understand you—I don't know what you mean," she said; "I think you must be mad."

"O, you'll know what I mean soon enough. I'm strong and you're weak; and you'll know what it is to have a woman against you that's strong enough and resolute enough, and obstinate enough, if you like it better, to go through any thing. We wasn't given to liking every body, neither she nor I; but we did care for each other, I tell you. O, poor dear, poor dear!" cried the mourner, throwing herself down by the bed and bursting into tears—"I'm all alone now, and I've nobody to care for in the world."

It was a dreadful sight—this anger and sorrow mingled together, to which the poor wretch gave way. Gabrielle felt that this was no time to bandy words with the woman, or to take notice of expressions uttered in the madness of a first sorrow. What had been said was incomprehensible, but this was not the time to ask for an explanation. So she took the opportunity of this burst of grief to steal noiselessly out of the room, and going downstairs into the little room on the ground-floor, sat there with the door open listening for what might come next.

She had not sat so long before she heard the house-door opened swiftly from without, and then the sound of footsteps passing hastily along the passage and up the stairs.

She stole out just in time to see her husband and a strange gentleman ascending the staircase.

The strange gentleman was the doctor.

CHAPTER XIX.

GABRIELLE'S DANGER.

THE doctor, in company with Mr. Penmore, went upstairs, and entered the room where his services were required with a soft professional tread. Jane Cantanker was still there seated by the side of the bed. She had put the room in some sort of order and partly closed the shutters, and then she had sat down to wait and watch.

Doctor Giles, physician by appointment to the police force, was a gentleman of skill and penetration. Accustomed by the very nature of his function to deal with exceptional cases, accustomed to see death in its more violent and sudden phases—one glance at the form which lay there upon the bed told him that his utmost skill could be of no service here, and that the duty which he had to perform was to the dead, and not to the living. He went, however, through the accustomed

formalities. He felt for the pulse which beat no longer, he listened for the action of the heart which had ceased to palpitate. He lifted the eyelid, which the woman who stood beside him had piously closed; and he placed a small mirror before the mouth and nostrils, and scrutinized it eagerly for any trace of mist or vapour which might have come upon its polished surface. There was no such thing. This formula gone through, Dr. Giles with mechanical orderliness hung up the looking-glass on the nail from which he had taken it, and drawing Penmore aside into one of the windows spoke thus:

“It is all over.”

Gilbert bowed his head. “So I feared,” he answered.

“Have you any idea as to the cause of death?” asked the doctor.

“None whatever.”

“That must be looked into later,” said Dr. Giles.

“By all means,” replied Gilbert. “How long do you think she has been dead?”

The doctor went back to the bedside, and Gilbert followed him.

“There is still,” said the doctor, “some

slight degree of warmth underneath the body and on the crown of the head, always the last place which the vital heat deserts. She has not been dead very long."

These words seemed to put the fact of the death before the dead lady's servant with new reality, and she sobbed with a revived passionateness.

"Who is this?" whispered the doctor to Gilbert.

"She was the lady's servant," answered Penmore; "and was, I believe, much attached to her mistress."

Dr. Giles waited till the woman's grief had in a measure subsided, and then he spoke to her.

"You were in the service of the deceased lady?"

"Yes, sir," sobbed the woman.

"Were you with her at the time of her death?"

"No, sir—poor dear—I wish I had been. When I came in this morning she was lying quite still, and almost as you see her now; and I let her be a while, thinking she must have had a bad night, and was making up for it now."

"Was she in the habit of having bad nights?" asked the doctor.

"Sometimes, sir. She was very fitful-like about her sleep, and sometimes she'd do nothing but sleep and doze even in the daytime as well as the night, and at other times she'd be constantly restless and wakeful."

"And on this particular morning you thought she'd passed one of these more wakeful nights?" inquired Doctor Giles.

"Yes, sir; and, as I said, I let her be a bit; and then I looked towards her again, and something scared me about the look of her face, and the jaw dropped open—that wasn't her habit. And then I went up nearer and found—found her as you see."

"And you have no knowledge of any illness under which this lady may have been suffering, and which might have caused her death?" asked the doctor.

"No, sir, I have not."

"Had she any regular medical attendant?"

"No, sir, that is to say, not in London; her last medical attendant was Dr. Hood of Woodfood."

Dr. Giles made a note of the name and

address. He took out his card at the same time and placed it on the chimney-piece; "In case I am wanted," he said.

"I suppose," said Mr. Penmore, "that it will be desirable to make some examination as to the cause of death."

"O, undoubtedly," answered the doctor; "in the course of this afternoon."

As if this had suggested something to him, the doctor turned round again as he was about to leave the room, and, addressing Jane Cantanker, said:

"What food did the lady partake of last?"

"She had her supper sent up as usual, sir; a couple of poached eggs and some stout. She hardly ate any thing though."

"Did she drink the stout?"

"Yes, sir, every drop."

The doctor was silent for a little while, and stood looking at the corpse as if he were revolving something in his mind. Presently he stooped down, and opening the lips of the dead lady smelt them very carefully, as well as the mouth, which he also opened. This lasted some time; it seemed as if he had a difficulty in satisfying himself.

"There is a smell of opium," he said.

A movement of surprise on the part of Gilbert and Cantanker followed this announcement.

"Was your mistress in the habit of taking opium, do you know?" asked the doctor, addressing Jane Cantanker.

"No, sir, certainly not, that I'm aware of."

"There is no doubt about the smell," continued the doctor. "You can judge for yourself," he added to Gilbert.

Penmore bent over the body as the doctor had done. "The smell is there decidedly," he answered.

"I will return by and by," said Dr. Giles, "with an experienced surgeon of my acquaintance, and we will proceed to a further investigation. Meanwhile do not let the body be touched or disturbed in any way."

"Will it be necessary to have an inquest?" asked Penmore, who had, as we all have, a dread of that kind of inquiry.

"I cannot tell," answered the doctor, "till the examination I have spoken of has taken place. After that you shall know at once. And now," he continued, "I must leave you for a short time; but I will return when I

have secured the assistance of my friend, and made what preparations are necessary." And so saying, the doctor went out of the room attended by Mr. Penmore, and descending the stairs left the house as quietly as he had entered it; but not before he had once more repeated the caution: "Be very sure that no one meddles at all with the body, or attempts to cleanse the mouth or lips while I am away."

Penmore went into the little parlour as soon as the doctor was gone, and found his wife waiting eagerly to hear what the medical authority had said.

"I am afraid," said Gilbert, after relating what had taken place, and how the doctor's suspicions had been awakened by the smell of opium; "I am so afraid that it will be thought necessary to have an inquest."

"O," cried Gabrielle—whom the word frightened terribly—"I hope not; why surely that can't be necessary. It implies suspicion, doesn't it?"

"Well, not precisely. It simply implies that there are circumstances connected with the death which require to be investigated."

"Why, Gilbert," said his wife, "surely

there can't be any thing of the sort. I thought such things only took place in dreadful neighbourhoods, and where deeds of violence and crime were common."

"An inquest may be held any where where a death takes place which cannot be perfectly accounted for to the satisfaction of the medical attendant who is called in."

Poor Mrs. Penmore's mind was greatly disturbed by this dreadful word "inquest." There was something terrible to her about the idea of being thus brought into actual contact with part of the machinery organised by the Government of the country as a means of detecting and punishing crime. What a dreadful chance was this which had brought such a possibility, even, so near them! The events of this long morning (and it seemed a week since the moment of the first alarm) were surely bad enough already, without this new thing to make it worse.

"It surely cannot be necessary," said Gabrielle.

"I hope it may not prove so," replied her husband. "I own that I should be very much annoyed if it were considered necessary."

And now Gabrielle had to tell her husband of that distressing interview which had taken place in the room upstairs between herself and Jane Cantanker. Coming upon her so soon after that first shock caused by the death, this scene had shaken and disturbed her sadly; and it was a comfort to her to speak of it to Gilbert, and the more so as he seemed disposed to view the whole thing as simply ridiculous.

"You did quite right," he said, "not to bandy words with her about such folly. She is made up of spite and venom, and would be only too glad, no doubt, to do either of us a mischief if she could. I believe, too, that she is really made almost frantic with grief by this miserable business."

"I think she was really attached to her mistress," said Gabrielle, "and her mistress to her."

"Not a doubt of it," replied Gilbert. "They had the attraction for each other of being both—however I won't say that," he added, interrupting himself; "and so my little timid woman is to be called a murderess," he continued. "Well, you don't look much like it, at any rate."

And now it became necessary to think what friends or relatives of the deceased lady it would be right to communicate with. Penmore knew of no relations nearer, or indeed so near, as himself. His mother, who had been his father's first cousin, had long been dead; and now the late Mrs. Penmore's children were next of kin to the children of Mrs. Penmore's first cousin. There were some remote cousins yet, with whom Miss Carrington had resided before she came to live in London; and to these Gilbert wrote at once, announcing what had happened, and inviting any member of the family who might be disposed to do so, to come up and look into the deceased lady's affairs. He wrote also to her solicitors to the same effect. After this it was necessary for him to go out in order to find some one who could relieve him for a day or two of certain pressing duties which for the time it would be impossible for him to attend to.

When Dr. Giles and Gilbert Penmore left the room upstairs, after the doctor's useless visit had been paid, the servant, Jane Cantanker, remained behind. She sat herself down by the bedside and began thinking; and, to

judge by appearances, her thoughts were of a dark and dangerous complexion. Those words which the doctor had let drop at last seemed to have made a powerful impression upon her; for, after thinking awhile, she also knelt down by the bedside and made an attempt to detect that smell of opium of which the medical authority had spoken with so much confidence. "I don't know what the smell of opium is," she said to herself; "but that there is the smell of some medical stuff or other there, is beyond the shadow of a doubt."

Then she got up and began to pace the room up and down; and then, as if suddenly remembering something, she stopped short, and going to the chimney-piece took up the card, which it will be remembered the doctor had placed there, and perused it carefully. After that she resumed her pacing of the room once more, and then she opened the door softly and left the room. She came back in a minute or two, having put on her bonnet and shawl in the mean time, and went up to the chimney-piece and once more read the address upon the card; and that done, and having looked round again at the bed and what lay upon it, she finally left the apartment.

She went downstairs and out of the house, and proceeded along the street, looking up at all the corners as if in search of some particular turning. At last she came to one which was inscribed Henry Street. Here she paused; and, after looking about her once more, went up to a house which had a coloured lamp over the door, and two bells, one over the other, marked respectively "night," and "surgery." She gave a smart pull at this last, and the door was presently opened by a tall pale young man with a blotchy countenance and a depressed appearance, who responded to her inquiry, "whether Dr. Giles was at home," by simply holding the door back and making a sign to her to enter, but without speaking a word.

Mrs. Cantanker, availing herself of this silent invitation, went into the house, and passed through a small door at once into the surgery. There was an inner glass-door in this apartment which was labelled "consulting-room." But though the door was glazed as to its upper-half, there was a muslin curtain on the other side of it, so that no one could see through to the room within. There was a dim sound of voices coming from this apartment.

"Dr. Giles is engaged for the moment,"

said the sorrowful-looking gentleman; "but if you'll sit down for a minute or two, he won't be long;" and with that the young assistant returned to the preparation of a mixture, of which "two table-spoonfuls were to be taken every four hours," with great zest and assiduity.

Mrs. Cantanker watched him as he went on with the preparation, hardly knowing that she did so. Yet if she had been examined afterwards she could have told to how many of the bottles on the different shelves he had had recourse, how large a dose he had got out of each, and what were the colours of the different liquids which were used. She had registered these things in her mind without there being the least necessity for doing so, and almost unconsciously; for there was present to her mind, all the time, a certain upper room, not far off, with a bed in it, and *something* lying on the bed. The surgery, with its bottles, and its pestle and mortar, its glass-door and its umbrella-stand, she saw too, but her sense of sight took in these much as our sense of hearing takes in the accompaniment to a sad song whose words are all the time rivetting our attention, whether we will or not.

By and by the glass-door was opened, and a policeman, hard as a nail and stiff as a poker, came from within, accompanied by the doctor. Curiously they had just been engaged in talking about an inquest, of all things in the world.

"It will take place at four o'clock, sir," said the policeman, "if that will be convenient to you."

"O, yes," said the doctor, "that'll do. By the bye," he added, as his eye fell upon the figure of Cantanker, "I think most likely that the coroner will have to open another before long, in Beaumont Street."

The policeman had nothing to do with unofficial communications of this sort, so he stiffly took his departure without any word; and the doctor bustling back intimated to Mrs. Cantanker that he was at liberty now to hear any thing that she might have to communicate to him. And he led the way into the consulting-room.

"It is the servant who lives at the house inhabited by that angelic woman, Mrs. Penmore," said the assistant to himself, pausing as the door closed, in the act of making up a black draught. The young man was susceptible and sentimental, and he had seen Gabrielle in his

professional excursions about the neighbourhood, and respectfully adored her.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the glass-door, a conversation, which was likely to be fraught with serious consequences, was being carried on between Jane Cantanker and the police doctor.

"I have called," said the former, "in consequence of something which dropped from you when you were round at our place this morning. Your suspicions seemed to be aroused by that smell of opium which you were able to discover upon my poor mistress's lips?"

"Eh, what? you think there's been foul play, do you? Ah, well, I'm not surprised."

Surprised! no indeed. That must be a strange piece of iniquity, indeed, which could surprise Dr. Giles, surgeon to the police force. Squalor, crime, deceit, and concealment, formed the very atmosphere in which this man lived. Yet he had not become a hard man either. Only he could not be astonished. He was bankrupt as to that original stock-in-trade of surprise, with which we all start in life pretty well provided.

"I don't wish to say any thing about 'foul play,' sir, as yet," said Cantanker; "only there

is circumstances connected with the case which I am free to own have awakened my suspicions, and which I should wish to communicate to you immediate."

"Well, my good lady, and what are those?" inquired the doctor, taking up a pen ready to make notes of her answers.

"Well, sir, in the first place, the lady of the house in which my poor mistress was living was not on good terms with my mistress."

"Ay, ay, ay!" ejaculated the doctor, making a note.

"They had had a regular quarrel on the very day preceding her death, and Mrs. Penmore had gone so far as to say that my poor mistress was 'not fit to live.'"

The doctor pursed up his lips and wrote again.

"But now comes the most suspicious part of all, sir," Cantanker went on. "It is my custom—or rather it *was* my custom—to take up my mistress's supper—poor, dear thing!—every night into her room. Well, sir, on this particular evening, just as I was preparing the meal, down comes this very lady into the kitchen, which she never did before in the evening, and begs and entreats me to give up my usual prac-

tice, and to let her take up my poor lady's supper that once. Sir, I resisted and refused her over and over again, but she went on persisting and cajoling, and saying that she wanted to make her peace with my mistress after what had occurred in the afternoon, meaning the quarrel between them; in short, she was that persevering that at last I gave way, though very unwilling, and she actually took the tray out of my hands—though, you must know, smiling all the time in play like—and carried it upstairs.

“Sir, I stood and listened at the bottom of the stairs, for I couldn't rightly understand it all, and I heard her stop and turn into a room on the first-floor, my mistress's apartments being on the second. She went into this room, tray and all, and stayed there some time, and then she came out and continued ascending the stairs, but slowly and in a hesitating way like. She seemed to stop outside the door, too, for a short time, and then she knocked and went in.”

“She might have stopped outside to get breath, you know,” said the doctor; “there is nothing in that.”

“Well, sir, I tell you what happened just as it *did* happen,” replied Cantanker.

"Tell me," said Dr. Giles, after thinking a little while, "what did this supper consist of? What was there on the tray?"

"There was two eggs lightly poached on toast, and a jug of stout."

"Did any remains of these articles come down?" asked the doctor.

"The eggs, sir, was nearly untouched, but the stout was all drunk."

The next question was put very earnestly and quickly.

"Have you preserved what came down?"

"Sir, I have not. As to the heggs, feeling a slight sinking, I ate them myself. For the stout, it was all gone, as I have said."

"And has the jug been washed out?"

"Yes, sir, it has, and is as clean as when it was made."

"Ah, that's unfortunate. You did not feel any ill effects after eating the eggs?"

"I had a severe heartburn in the night, sir; but to that I am accustomed, as it gnaws at me pretty well every night of my life."

"And when were your suspicions first excited?" inquired the doctor.

"Directly my poor mistress died, sir. I thought then of the quarrel and of Mrs. Pen-

more's anxiety to take the supper-tray up, and putting all together I began to suspect. For I knew what sort of terms they'd both been on ever since my mistress entered the house, and how my poor lady was no favourite with Mrs. Pingmore, nor never had been."

The doctor sat and reflected again, biting the top of his pen, and looking in an absent manner at Jane Cantanker.

"It is a pity," he said at last, "that you washed out that jug."

"There is one other circumstance connected with it that I should wish to mention," remarked the woman.

"Yes, and what is that?"

"My mistress, when I went upstairs to take down the supper-tray, objected very strongly to the stout, and said that it was the nastiest she had ever tasted."

"She said that, did she?" asked the doctor shrewdly. "That's very important." And he made a note of it forthwith.

"Well," said the doctor, rising—for his large experience of persons of Mrs. Cantanker's class had taught him that they never knew when to go, and always stop where they are till the propriety of a move is sug-

gested to them from without—"I suppose there is nothing more to be said now, and I will come round and proceed to the necessary investigations this afternoon."

And with that he brought the interview to a close, and, after escorting his visitor to the door, went back to the surgery and to a snug mutton chop, which was always ready for him about this time.

Meanwhile Mrs. Cantanker went back at the top of her speed, and entered the house modestly by the kitchen entrance. There was something of secrecy now, about all her actions.

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